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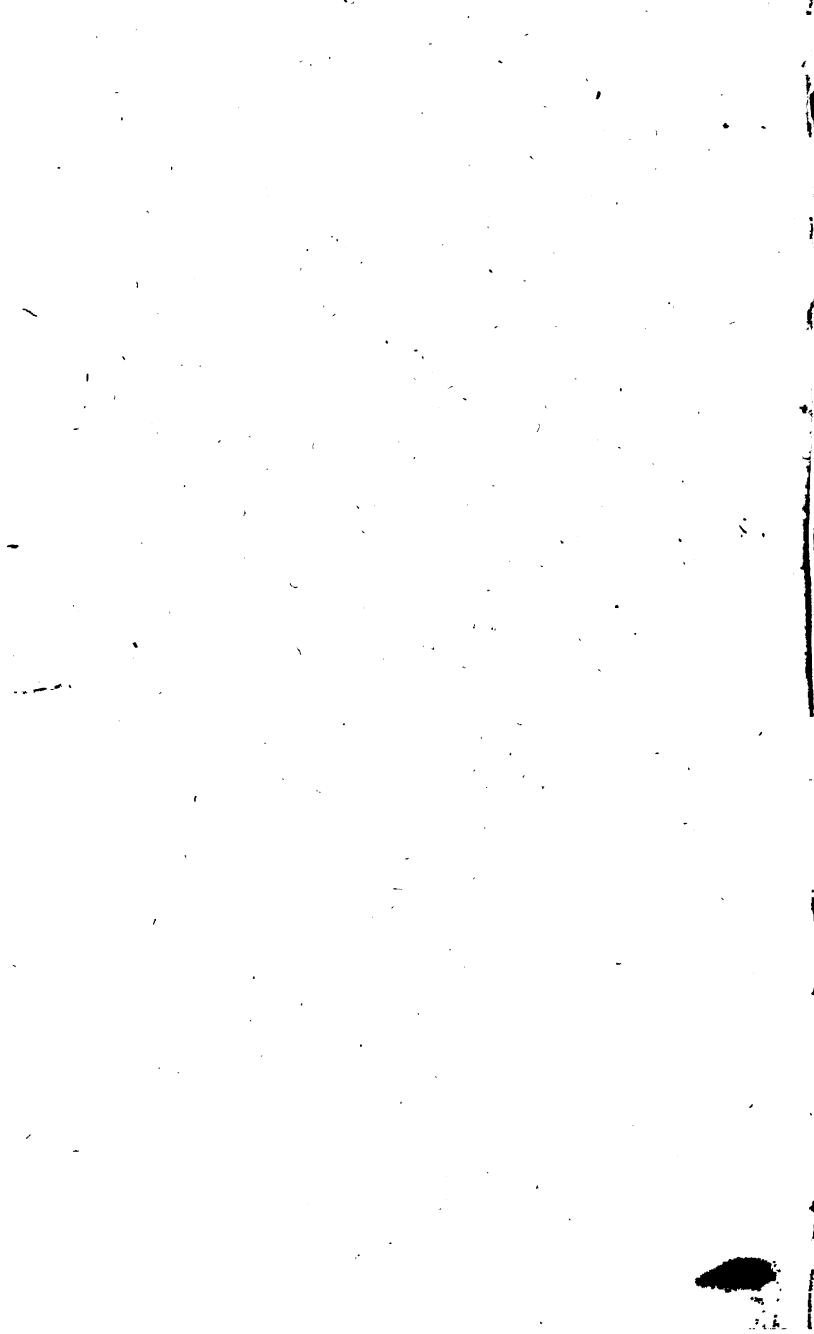
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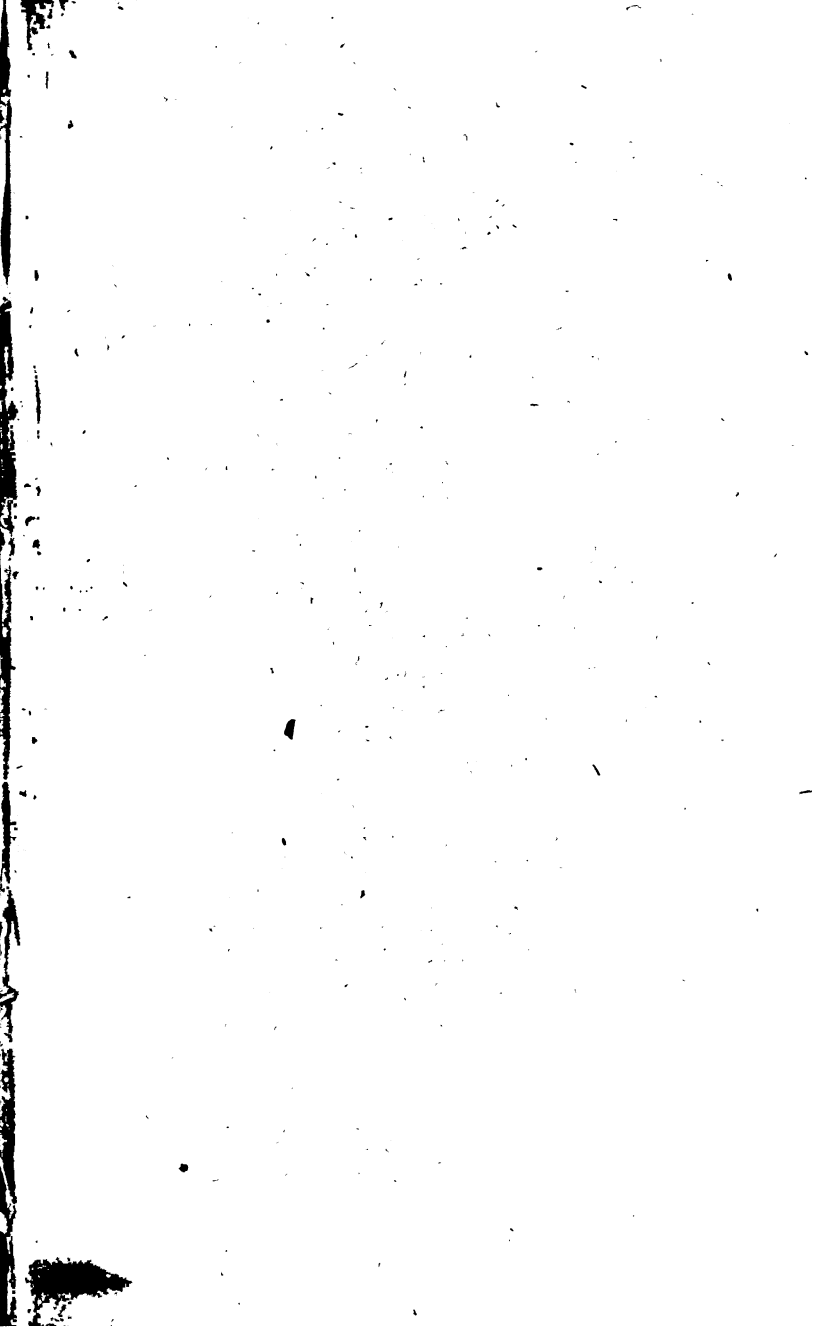
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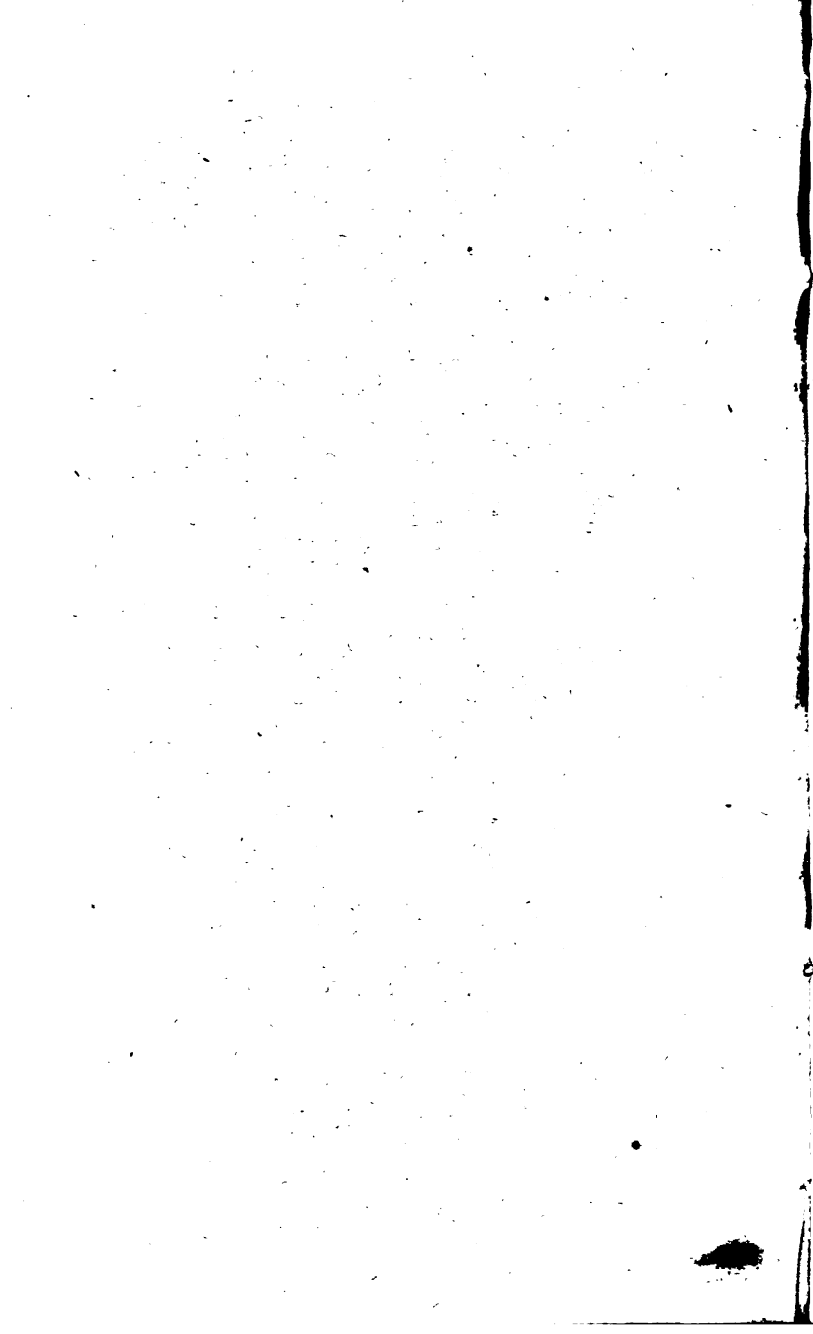
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A TREATISE
ON
CHURCH GOVERNMENT.
FORMERLY CALLED
ANARCHY OF THE RANTERS,
&c.
BEING A TWO-FOLD APOLOGY
FOR THE
CHURCH AND PEOPLE OF GOD,
CALLED, IN DERISION, QUAKERS.

WHEREIN

They are vindicated from those that accuse them of disorder and confusion on the one hand, and from such as columniate them with tyranny and imposition on the other; showing, that as the true and pure principles of the gospel are restored by their testimony; so is also the ancient apostolic order of the Church of Christ re-established among them, and settled upon its right basis and foundation.

BY ROBERT BARCLAY.

Phil. ii. 3. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

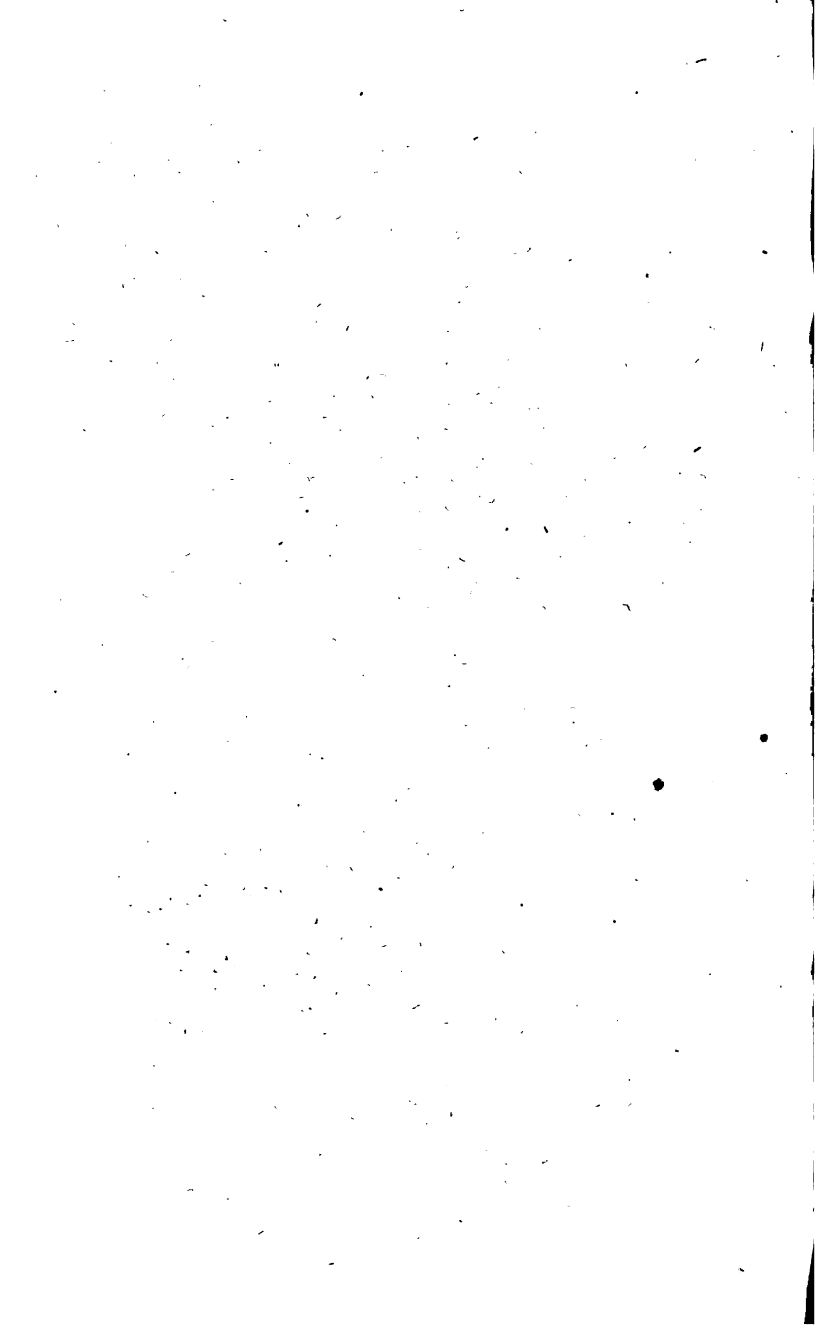
Heb. xiii. 7. Remember them that have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow.



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1830.



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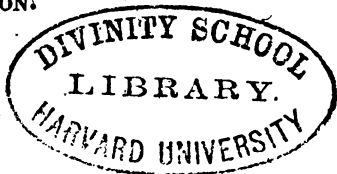
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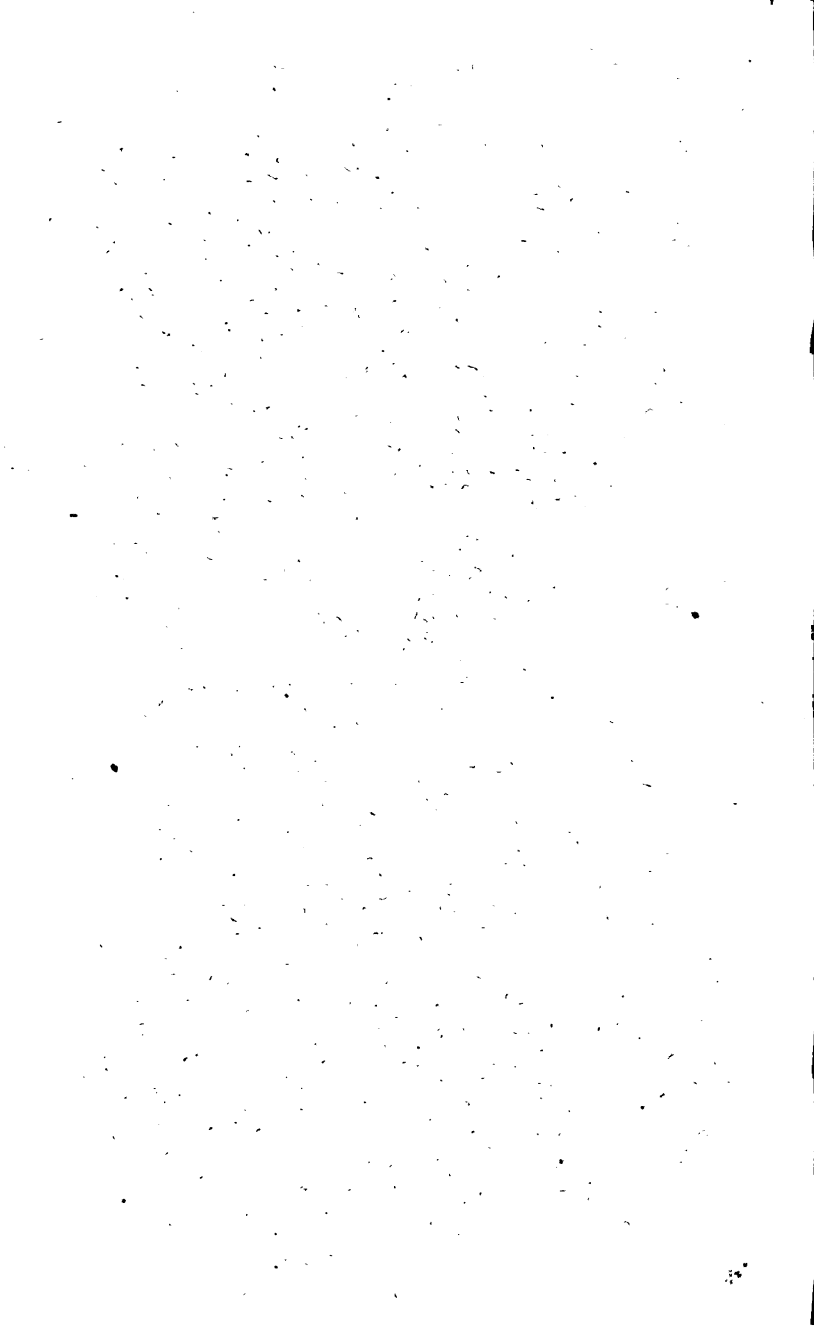
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A TREATISE
ON
CHURCH GOVERNMENT.



SECTION I.

The Introduction and Method of this Treatise.

AFTER that the Lord God in his own appointed time had seen meet to put an end to the dispensation of the law, which was delivered to the children of Israel, by the ministry of Moses; through and by whom he did communicate unto them in the wilderness from Mount Sinai, divers commandments, ordinances, appointments and observations, according as they are testified in the writings of the law; it pleased him to send his own Son the Lord Jesus Christ in the fulness of time; who having perfectly fulfilled the law, and the righteousness thereof, gave witness to the dispensation of the gospel. And having approved himself, and the excellency of his doctrine, by many great and wonderful signs and miracles, he sealed it with his blood; and triumphing over death (of which it was impossible for him to be held) he cherished and encouraged his despised witnesses, who had believed in him, in that he appeared to them, after he was raised from the dead; comforting them with the hope and assurance of the pouring forth of his Spirit, by which

they were to be led and ordered in all things; in and by which, he was to be with them to the end of the world, not suffering the gates of hell to prevail against them. By which Spirit come upon them, they being filled, were emboldened to preach the gospel without fear; and, in a short time, thousands were added to the church; and the multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul; and great love and zeal prevailed, and there was nothing lacking for a season.

But all that were caught in the net did not prove good and wholesome fish; some were again to be cast into that ocean, from whence they were drawn: of those many that were called, all proved not chosen vessels, fit for the master's use; and of all that were brought into the great supper and marriage of the king's son, there were that were found without the wedding garment.—Some made a shōw for a season, and afterwards fell away; there were that drew back; there were that made shipwreck of faith, and of a good conscience: there were not only such as did backslide themselves, but sought to draw others into the same perdition with themselves, seeking to overturn their faith also; yea, there were that brought in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them. And also of those members that became not wholly corrupt, (for some were never again restored by repentance) there were that were weak, and sickly, and young; some were to be fed with milk, and not with strong meat; some were to be purged, when the old leaven received any place; and some to be cut

off for a season, to be shut out, as it were, of the camp for a time, until their leprosy was healed, and then to be received in again.

Moreover, as to outwards, there was the care of the poor, of the widow, of the fatherless, of the strangers, &c. Therefore the Lord Jesus Christ who is the head of the body, the church, (for the church is the body of Christ, and the saints are the several members of that body) knowing in his infinite wisdom, what was needful for the good ordering and disposing all things in their proper place, and for preserving and keeping all things in their right station, did, in the dispensation and communication of his holy Spirit, minister unto every member, a measure of the same Spirit, yet diverse according to operation, for the edification of the body; some apostles, some teachers, some pastors, some elders; there are old men, there are young men, there are babes. For all are not apostles, neither are all elders, neither are all babes; yet are all members: and as such, all have a sense and feeling of the life of the body, which from the head, flows unto all the body, as the ointment of Aaron's beard unto the skirts of his garment: and every member has its place and station in the body, so long as it keeps in the life of the body; and all have need one of another; yet is no member to assume another place in the body, than God has given it; nor yet to grudge or repine its fellow member's place; but be content with its own; for the uncomely parts, are no less needful than the comely; and the less honourable than the more honourable; which the apostle Paul holds forth in 1 Cor. xii. from verse 13 to 30.

Now the ground of all schisms, divisions or rents in the body is, when as any member assumes another place than is allotted it; or being gone from the life and unity of the body, and losing the sense of it, lets in the murmurer, the eye that watches for evil, and not in holy care over its fellow members: and then, instead of coming down to judgment in itself, will stand up and judge its fellow members, yea, the whole body, or those whom God has set in a more honourable and eminent place in the body than itself. Such suffer not the word of exhortation; and term the reproofs of instruction, which is the way of life, imposition and oppression, and are not aware how far they are in the things they condemn others for; while they spare not to reprove and revile all their fellow members: yet if they be but admonished themselves, they cry out as if their great charter of gospel liberty were broken.

Now though such, and the spirit by which they are acted, be sufficiently seen and felt by thousands, whose hearts God has so established as they are out of danger of being entangled in that snare, and who have power and strength in themselves to judge that spirit, even in its most subtle appearances; yet there are, who cannot so well withstand the subtilty, and seeming sincerity some such pretend to, though in measure they have a sight of them; and others, that cannot so rightly distinguish between the precious and the vile; and some there are that through weakness, and want of true discerning, may be deceived, and the simplicity in them betrayed for a season; as it is written, "with fair speeches and smooth words they deceive the hearts of the simple."

Therefore having, according to my measure, received an opening in my understanding as to these things, from the light of the Lord, and having been for some time under the weighty sense of them, I find at this instant a freedom to commit them to writing, for the more universal benefit and edification of the Church of Christ.

Now for the more plain and clear opening and understanding of these things, it is fit to sum up this treatise in these following general heads, to be considered of:

First, From whence the ground and cause of this controversy is, the rise and root of it?

Secondly, Whether there be now any order and government in the Church of Christ?

Thirdly, What is the order and government which we plead for? In what cases, and how far it may extend? In whom the power decisive is, and how it differeth? And is wholly another than the oppressing and persecuting principality of the church of Rome, and other anti-christian assemblies.



SECTION II.

Concerning the ground and cause of this Controversy.

WHEN as the Lord God by his mighty power, began to visit the nations with the dawning of his heavenly day, (for thus I write unto those that have received and believed the truth) and that he sent forth his instruments, whom he had fitted and prepared for his work, having fashioned

them not according to the wisdom and will of man, but to his own heavenly wisdom and counsel, they went forth and preached the gospel in the evidence and demonstration of the Spirit: not in the enticing words of man's wisdom; but in appearance as fools and mad, to those that judged according to man. But their words and testimony pierced through into the inner man in the heart, and reached to that of God in the conscience; whereby as many as were simple-hearted and waited for the redemption of their souls, received them as the messengers of the most high God; and their words were unto them, not as the words of men, but as the words of God; for in the receiving and embracing the testimony of truth through them, they felt their souls eased, and the acceptable day began to dawn in and upon them.

Now what evidence brought these men to make their testimony to be received? did they entice? did they flatter? did they daub up? did they preach liberty to the flesh or will of man? nay verily, they used no such method: their words were as thunder-bolts, knocking down all that stood in their way, and pouring down the judgment of God upon the head of the transgressor every where. Did they spare the zealous professor more than the open prophane? nay verily, they condemned equally the hypocrisy of the one, as well as the profanity of the other; yet wanted they not regard to the tender seed and plant of God in either. Did they give way? did they yield to the wisdom of man? to the deceitfulness of the serpent, that would reason truth for them-

selves, saying, I must stay until I be convinced of this, and that, and the other thing ; I see not yet this to be wrong, or the other thing to be my duty ? How did they knock down this manner of reasoning by the Spirit of God, which wrought mightily in them, showing and holding forth, that this is the day of the Lord that is dawned ; that all are invited to come ; that none ought to tarry behind : that that which so pleadeth is the same spirit which of old time said in those that were invited, I cannot come yet, I must first marry a wife ; I must go prove my yoke of oxen ; I must go visit my possessions ; let me first bury my dead father. Did not the Lord through them testify and declare against these things ? and is there not a cloud of witnesses, who felt the enemy thus reasoning to keep us in the forms, fellowships, false worships, and foolish fashions of this world ? But we felt, as we were obedient, all these things to be for condemnation ; and that, as we obeyed the pure manifestation of the light of Jesus in our hearts, there was no hesitation. We might and should have parted with all those things at the first ; and what occasioned such scruples, was but that which drew back, through being unwilling to give pure obedience to the cross of Christ ; for as many as gave obedience and believed in the light, found no occasion of stumbling ; but such as believed not were condemned already, because they believed not in him that appeared. Now the boldness, and courage, and efficacy of these messengers testimony, wrought such astonishment, fear, and amazement in the hearts of such as were ingenuous, that many began to be inwardly pricked,

as in the days of old, and the foundations of many began to be shaken ; and some that were asleep were awakened, and many that were dead and buried in the graves of sin, and formality and superstition, and idolatry of all sorts, were alarmed ; and many were brought in from the hedges and the high ways, and the truth was received by thousands with great cheerfulness, and a readiness of mind : and the feet of those were beheld to be beautiful upon the mountains, that brought the glad tidings of these good things. And great lowliness and simplicity of heart was upon such that were newly convinced of the truth, and deep humiliation of spirit and subjection to the power, both in themselves, and in those who were over them in the Lord, and had gathered them into the truth.

But as it was in the gatherings of old, so it also fell out in this day ; all kept not their first love : as among those thousands, which Moses led out of Egypt, and carried through the Red sea, who had sung praises to God upon the banks of salvation, many carcases fell in the wilderness ; some who murmured and longed to return again to the flesh-pots of Egypt ; and some for opposing and contradicting the servant and servants of the Lord, whom the Lord had made use of to lead them out of bondage, in saying, ye take too much upon you ; hath the Lord indeed only spoken by Moses ? hath he not spoken also by us ? And as among these multitudes which were gathered by the apostles, there were many who continued not faithful to the end ; some returned back again with the sow to the puddle after they were wash-

ed; some embraced the present world; some again separated themselves, being sensual, and without the spirit, *despising dominions, and speaking evil of dignities*; their mouths speaking great swelling words, being puffed up, and not abiding in these things, which they were taught of the apostles; so it is to be lamented, that among these many thousands, whom the apostles and evangelists whom God raised up in this day (for the gathering of his seed and people out of spiritual Egypt and Babylon into his pure light and life) did bring forth and gather, there are that have fallen upon the right hand and the left. Some are turned back again into Egypt, running into the same excess of lust and riot, from whence they were once purified and redeemed: some could not bear the reproach of the cross of Christ; and were by and anon offended in him: some could not bear the tribulations, sufferings and persecutions, which came for the truth's sake; and the seed in them was soon scorched with the heat of the day. And some not abiding in subjection to the truth in themselves, were not contented with that place and station in the body, which God had placed them in; but became vainly puffed up in their fleshly minds, intruding into those things which they had not seen: and would needs be innovators, given to change, and introducing new doctrines and practices, not only differing, but contrary to what was already delivered in the beginning; making parties, causing divisions and rents, stumbling the weak, and denying, despising and reviling the apostles and messengers of Christ, the elders of the church, who loved not their lives

unto death, but through much care, and travel, and watchings, and whippings, and bonds, and beatings, in daily jeopardy, gathered us by the mighty power of God into the most precious truth. Yet in all this there hath nothing befallen us, but that which hath been the ancient lot of the Church of Christ in the primitive times.

Now he, that was careful for his church and people in old times, hath not been wanting to us in our day; but as he has again restored the truth unto its primitive integrity and simplicity, and as he has delivered our understandings from these false doctrines and principles, which prevailed in the apostacy; so he hath not gathered us to be "as sheep scattered without a shepherd," that every one may run his own way, and every one follow his own will, and so to be as a confused mass or Chaos, without any order; but he, even the Lord, hath also gathered, and is gathering us into the good order, discipline, and government of his own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ: therefore he hath laid care upon some beyond others, who watch for the souls of their brethren, as they that must give account.

There are then fathers that have begotten us unto Christ Jesus through the gospel, of whom we ought to be followers, and to remember their ways, which be in Christ. There are then fathers and children, instructors and instructed, elders and young men, yea, and babes; there are that cannot cease, but must exhort, instruct, reprove, condemn, judge; or else for what end gave Christ the gifts mentioned, Ephes. iv. 11. 12? And how are the saints perfected, and the

body of Christ edified of those, who came under the cognizance, and, as it were, the test of this order and government? I may chiefly sum them up in three sorts (though there be divers other little subdivided species of them.)

The first is, Those that turn openly back to the world again, through finding the way of truth too narrow. These have not been capable to do us any considerable hurt; for being a salt, that has lost its savour, they mostly prove a stink among those to whom they go. And I never knew any of them, that proved any way steady among those to whom they go. I find other professors make but small boast of any proselytes they got out from among us; I hear little of their proving champions for the principles of others against us. And, indeed, for the most part they lose all religion with the truth: for I have heard some of them say; That if ever they took on them to be religious, they would come back again to the Quakers, &c.

Secondly, Those, who through unwatchfulness, the secret corruption of their own hearts, and the mysterious or hidden temptations of the enemy, have fallen into his snares; and so have come under the power of some temptation or other, either of fleshly lusts, or of spiritual wickedness: who being seasonably warned by those that keep their habitation, and faithful overseers in the church, have been again restored by unfeigned repentance; not kicking against the pricks; but have rejoiced, that others watched over them for their good, and are become monuments of God's mercy unto this day.

Thirdly, Such, who being departed from their first love and ancient zeal for the truth, become cold and lukewarm; and yet are ashamed to make open apostacy, and to turn back again, so as to deny all the principles of truth, they having had already such evidence of clearness upon their understanding; yet not keeping low in their own habitations, but being puffed up, and giving way to the restless imaginations of their exalted and wandering minds, fall out with their brethren; cause divisions; begin to find fault with every thing, and to look at others more than at themselves; with swelling words to talk of, and preach up, a higher dispensation, while they are far from living up to the life and perfection of this present; like unto such who said, *We will not have this man to rule over us: cry out of formality and apostacy, because they are not followed in all things; and if they be reprov'd for their unruliness, according to the good order of the Church of Christ, then they cry out, Breach of liberty, oppression, persecution! we will have none of your order and government; we are taught to follow the light in our consciences, and not the orders of men.* Well, of this hereafter; but this gave the rise of this controversy: which leads me to that which I proposed in the second place.



SECTION III.

Whether there be now to be any order or government in the Church of Christ.

IN answer to this proposition, I meddle not at this time with those that deny any such thing as

a Church of Christ ; I have reserved their plea to another place. Neither need I to be at much pains to prove the affirmative, to wit, *that there ought to be government and order in the Church of Christ* unto the generality of our opposers, both papists and protestants ; who readily confess and acknowledge it, and have heretofore blamed us for want of it. Though now some of them, and that of the highest pretenders, are become so unreasonable, as to accuse us for the use of it ; improving it, so far as they can, to our disadvantage : for such is the blindness of partial envy, that whereas the supposed want of it was once reckoned heretical, now the present performance of it is counted criminal.

These, then, to whom I come to prove this thing, are such, who having cast off the yoke of the cross of Christ in themselves, refuse all subjection or government : denying that any such thing ought to be, as disagreeing with the testimony of truth ; or those, who not being so wilful and obstinate in their minds, yet are fearful or scrupulous in the matter in respect of the dangerous consequences, they may apprehend, such a thing may draw after it.

For the clearing then as well the mistakes of the one, as answering the cavils of the other, I judge the truth of these following assertions will sufficiently prove the matter ; which I shall make no great difficulty to evidence.

First, That Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, did appoint and ordain, that there should be order and government in it.

Secondly, That the apostles and primitive

Christians, when they were filled with the Holy Ghost, and immediately led by the Spirit of God, did practise and commend it.

Thirdly, That the same occasion and necessity now occurring, which gave them opportunity to exercise that authority, the Church of Christ hath the same power now as ever, and is led by the same spirit into the same practices.

As to the first, I know there are some, that the very name of a church, and the very words, order and government they are afraid of. Now this I suppose hath proceeded, because of the great hypocrisy, deceit and oppression, that hath been cloaked with the pretence of these things; but why should the Truth be neglected, because hypocrites have pretended to it? The right institution of these things, which have been appointed and ordained of God, must not, nor ought not to be despised, because corrupt men have abused and perverted them. I know not any thing that hath been more abused and perverted in the whole world, than the name of a Christian; shall we then renounce that honourable title, because so many thousands of wicked men, yea, Antichrists, have falsely assumed it to themselves? The man of sin hath taken upon him to sit in the temple of God, as God; yet we must not therefore deny, that God is in this temple. If the synagogue of Satan assumed the name of the Church of Christ, and hath termed her oppression and violence, the power and authority thereof; therefore must not the Church of Christ, and its authority, be exercised, where it truly is according to his mind? This I prefix to warn all to beware of stumbling at things

which are innocent in themselves ; and that we may labour to hold the steady, even path of truth, without running into either of the extremes. For that Jesus Christ did appoint order and government to be in the Church, is very clear from his plain words, Matt. xviii. 15. Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. Ver. 16. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. Ver. 17. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church : but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Ver. 18. Verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven. From which Scripture it doth manifestly and evidently follow; first, That Jesus Christ intended there should be certain order and method in his church, in the procedure towards such as transgress. Secondly, That he that refuseth to hear two, is become more guilty (as hardened) than in refusing to hear him that first reproveth alone. Thirdly, That refusing to hear the judgment of the church, or whole assembly, he doth thereby exclude himself, and shut out himself from being a member ; and is justly judged by his brethren as an heathen and a publican.

And lastly, that the church, gathering, or assembly of God's people, has power to examine and call to account such, as appearing to be among them, or owning the same faith with them, do

transgress; and in case of their refusing to hear, or repent, to exclude them from their fellowship: and that God hath a special regard to the judgment and sense of his people thus orderly proceeding, so as to hold such bound in heaven, whom they bind on earth, and such loosed in heaven, whom they loose on earth. I am partly confident, that no rational man will deny, but that these naturally follow from the above mentioned Scripture; and if there should be any found so unreasonable as to deny it, I could prove it by necessary and unavoidable consequences; which at present, as taken it for granted, I forbear to do. If it be reckoned so great a crime to offend one of the little ones, that it were better for him, that so doth, that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea; without question, to offend and gainsay the whole flock, must be more criminal, and must draw after it a far deeper judgment.

Now if there were no order nor government in the church, what should become of those that transgress? how should they be again restored? would not this make all reproving, all instructing, all caring for, and watching over one another, void and null? why should Christ have desired them to proceed after this method? why doth he place so much weight upon the judgment of the church, as to make the refusing of hearing it, to draw so deep a censure after it; which he will not have to follow the refusing to hear one or two apart, though the matter be one and the same? and so, as to the substantial and intrinsic truth of the thing, there lies the same obligation upon the transgressor to hear

that one, as well as all; for that one adviseth him to that which is right and good, as well as the whole; and they do but homologate or confirm that which that one hath already asserted: yet Jesus Christ, who is the author of order, and not of confusion, will not have a brother cut off, or reputed a publican, for refusing to hear one or two, but for refusing to hear the church. And if it be objected, that the Church of Rome, and all other false churches, make use of this Scripture, and cover their persecution, and cruelty, and oppression by it; and thou sayest no more than they say: I answer; I suppose no man will be so unreasonable as to affirm, that the Church of Rome abusing this Scripture, will make it false in itself; but how we differ in our application of this Scripture, shall be spoken of hereafter. I am not now claiming right to this power, as due to us (that is reserved for another place;) but this, I say, is that which I now aver to be manifest from the Scripture testimony, and to be in itself an unquestionable truth, *that Jesus Christ intended there should be order and government in his church*; which is the thing at present in hand to be proved: which if it be so really true (as it cannot be denied) then I hope it will also necessarily follow, that such who really and truly are the church of Christ, have a right to exercise this order and government.

Secondly, That the apostles and primitive Christians did practise order and government, we need but read the history of the Acts, of which I shall mention a few pregnant and undeniable testimonies; as we may observe in the very first

chapter of the Acts, from verse 13, to the end; where at the very first meeting the apostles and brethren held together after the ascension of Christ, they began orderly to appoint one to supply the place of Judas; it may be thought this was a needless ceremony; yet we see how the Lord countenanced it. I hope none will say, that the apostles appointing of these two men, or him, upon whom the lot did not fall, contradicted their inward freedom, or imposed upon it; but both agreed very well together; the one in the will and movings of God in appointing, and the other in the same, in submitting to their appointment.

Moreover, after they had received the Holy Ghost, you may read, Acts vi. so soon as there was an opportunity, how they wisely gave order concerning the distribution for the poor, and appointed some men for that purpose. So here was order and government, according to the present necessity of the case: and the Lord God was well pleased with it, and the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. Might they not have said then, as some say now; We will give our charity to whom we see cause; and we will take no notice of your appointments and orders: whether would God have approved of such, yea, or nay?

Thirdly, When that the business of circumcision fell in, whether it was fit or not to circumcise the Gentiles? We see, the apostles saw not meet, to suffer every one to follow their own minds and wills: they did not judge, as one confusedly supposeth, That this difference in an outward exercise, would commend the unity of the

true faith : nay they took another method. It is said expressly, Acts xv. 6. And the apostles and elders came together, to consider of this matter ; and after there had been much disputing about it, (no doubt then there were here diversities of opinions and judgments) the apostles and elders told their judgments, and came also to a positive conclusion. Sure some behoved to submit, else they thould never have agreed. So those that were the elders, gave a positive judgment ; and they were bold to say, That it pleased not only them but the Holy Ghost. By all which it doth undeniably appear, that the apostles and primitive saints, practised a holy order and government among themselves : and I hope none will be so bold as to say, they did these things without the leadings of the Spirit of God, and his power and authority concurring, and going along with them.

And that these things were not only singular practices, but that they held it doctrinally ; that is to say, it was doctrine which they preached ; that there ought to be order and government in the church, is manifest from the following testimonies : 1 Cor. iv. 15, 16, 17. For though you have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers : for in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore, I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord ; who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways, which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church. Here the apostle Paul is very ab-

solute : First, In that he desires them to be followers of him. Secondly, In that he sends a teacher, yea, a minister, and eminent bishop, or overseer of the church, for to put them in mind of his ways, which be in Christ, as he taught in every church. No doubt there were apostates, and dissenting spirits in the church of Corinth, that gave Paul occasion thus to write, as he testifies in the beginning of the chapter, how he was judged by some of them; he shows, how they were grown high; verse 8. Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us, &c. Might not these dissenters of the church of Corinth, have reasoned thus against Paul? Did not this Paul teach us, at first, to mind the measure of grace in ourselves, and follow that; (for no doubt that was Paul's doctrine) but now he begins to lord it over us, and tells us, we must be followers of him. Might they not have judged the beloved Timothy to be far out of his place? Might they not have said, it seems it is not God that moved thee, and sent thee here by his Spirit; but lordly Paul, that seeks dominion over our faith: It seems thou comest not here to preach Christ, and wish us to be followers of him, and of his grace in our hearts; but to mind us to follow Paul's ways, and take notice, how he teaches in every church: We are not concerned with him, nor with his messenger, nor with any of your orders, and so forth. Doth not this run very plausible? I question not but there was such a reasoning among the apostate Corinthians: let such as are of the same kind among us examine seriously, and

measure their spirits truly hereby. Yea, he goes yet further in the following chapter, verses 3, 4. Verse 3. As absent in body, but present in spirit, I have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done the deed. Verse 4. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, &c. Would not one think this to have been a very presumptuous word? And yet who dare offer to condemn it? From all which, I shall shortly observe, that it seems it was judged no inconsistency nor contradiction, to be followers of the grace in themselves, to be persuaded in their own hearts, and also to be followers of the apostle Paul, and of his ways; because his ways and example was no other than the spirit of God in themselves would have led them to, if they had been obedient: therefore, he found it needful to charge them positively to follow him, without adding this reason.

Next, the great argument the apostle uses to persuade them hereunto, upon which he mainly insists, because he had begotten them into the truth; Ye have not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel: wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. So he makes that as the cause; which the same apostle also in his expostulation with the Galatians, putting them in mind how he preached the gospel to them at first, and chap. iv. ver. 15. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, if possible ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and given them unto me.

We see then, that the Lord hath, and doth give such, whom he hath furnished, and sent forth to gather a people unto himself, care and oversight over that people; yea and a certain authority in the power over them to bring them back to their duty, when they stray at any time; and to appoint, yea, and command such things as are needful for peace, and order, and unity's sake: and that there lies an obligation upon such as are so gathered, to reverence, honour, yea, and obey such as are set over them in the Lord. For, saith the same apostle, 2 Cor. ii. 9. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether you be obedient in all things: and chap. vii. ver. 13, 15. Yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all. Ver. 15. And his inward affection is more abundant towards you, whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him.

Now this will not at all infer, as if they had been implicitly led of old: or that such, as having the same authority to exercise it now, sought dominion over their brethren's faith, or to force them to do any thing beyond, far less contrary to, what the Lord leads us to by his Spirit: but we know (as they did of old) that the enemy lies near to betray under such pretences. And seeing, in case of difference, the Lord hath, and doth, and will reveal his will to his people, and hath, and doth raise up members of his body, to whom he gives a discerning, and power, and authority to instruct, reprove, yea, and command in some cases, those that are faithful and low in their minds,

keeping their own places, and minding the Lord, and the interest and good of his truth in the general over all, shut out the murmurer; and the Spirit of God leads them to have unity, and concur with their brethren. But such as are heady and high-minded, are inwardly vexed, that any should lead or rule, but themselves: and so it is the high thing in themselves, that makes them quarrel with others for taking so much upon them; pretending a liberty, not sinking down in the seed to be willing to be of no reputation for its sake. Such, rather than give up their own wills, will study to make rents and divisions, not sparing the flock; but prostrating the reputation and honour of the truth even to the world, minister to them an occasion of scorn and laughter, to the hardening them in their wickedness and atheism.

Besides these Scriptures mentioned, I shall set down a few of many more that might be instanced to the same purpose.

Ephes. v. 21. Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Phil. ii. 3. Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves.

Verse 29. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such in reputation.

And iii. 17. Brethren, be followers together of me; and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample.

And iv. 9. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of Peace shall be with you.

Col. ii. 5. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

1 Thess. v. 12. And we beseech you brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you.

Verse 13. And to esteem them very highly in love, for their work's sake; and be at peace among yourselves.

Verse 14. Now we exhort you brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

2 Thess. ii. 15. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which you have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

2 Cor. x. 8. For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority (which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction) I should not be ashamed.

Now though the papists greatly abuse this place, as if hereby they could justify that mass of superstition, which they have heaped together; yet except we will deny the plain Scripture, we must needs believe, there lay an obligation upon the Thessalonians to observe and hold these appointments, and no doubt, needful institutions, which by the apostles were recommended unto them: and yet who will say, that they ought, or were thereby commanded to do any thing contrary to that which the Grace of God in their hearts moved them to?

2 Thess. iii. 4. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do, and will do the things which we command you.

Ver. 6. Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

What more positive than this? and yet the apostle was not here an imposer. And yet further, verse 14. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

Thus, Heb. xiii. 7. Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God, whose faith follow; considering the end of their conversation.

Verse 17. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account: that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.

Jude viii. Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities.

I might at length enlarge, if needful, upon these passages, any of which is sufficient to prove the matter in hand; but that what is said may satisfy such as are not wilfully blind and obstinate. For there can be nothing more plain from these testimonies, than that the ancient apostles and primitive Christians practised order and government in the church; that some did appoint and ordain certain things; condemn and approve certain practices, as well as doctrines, by the Spirit of God: that there lay an obligation in point of duty upon others to obey and submit: that

this was no encroachment nor imposition upon their Christian liberty; nor any ways contradictory to their being inwardly and immediately led by the Spirit of God in their hearts: and lastly, That such as are in the true feeling and sense, will find it their places to obey, and be one with the Church of Christ in such like cases: and that it is such as have lost their sense and feeling of the life of the body, that dissent, and are disobedient, under the false pretence of liberty. So that thus it is sufficiently proved what I undertook in this place.

Thirdly, I judge there will need no great arguments to prove the people of God may, and do well to exercise the like government upon the very like occasion. For even reason may teach us, that what proved good and wholesome cures to the distemper of the church in former ages, will not now (the very like distempers falling in) prove hurtful and poisonable; especially, if we have the testimony of the same Spirit in our hearts: not only allowing us, but commanding us so to do. It is manifest (though we are sorry for it) that the same occasions now fall in; we find that there are that have eaten and drunken with us at the table of the Lord, and have been sharers of the same spiritual joy and consolation, that afterwards fall away. We find, to our great grief, that some walk disorderly; and some are puffed up, and strive to sow division, labouring to stumble the weak, and to cause offences in the Church of Christ. What then is more suitable, and more Christian, than to follow the foot-steps of the flock, and to labour and travel for the good

of the church, and for the removing all that is hurtful; even as the holy apostles, who walked with Jesus, did before us? If there be such that walk disorderly now, must not they be admonished, rebuked and withdrawn from, as well as of old? Or is such to be the condition of the church in these latter times, that all iniquity must go unreproved? Must it be heresy, or oppression, to watch over one another, in love? To take care for the poor? To see that there be no corrupt, no defiled members of the body, and carefully and Christianly deal with them, for restoring them, if possible; and for withdrawing from them, if incurable? I am persuaded, that there are none that look upon the commands of Christ, and his apostles, the practice and experience of the primitive church and saints, as a sufficient precedent to authorize a practice now, that will deny the lawfulness or usefulness hereof, but must needs acknowledge the necessity of it. But if it be objected, (as some have done) do not you deny, that the scripture is the adequate rule of faith and manners; and that the commands or practices of the scripture are not a sufficient warrant for you now to do any thing, without you be again authorized, and led into it by the same spirit? And upon that score, do you not forbear some things both practised and commanded by the primitive church and saints?

Well, I hope I have not any thing weakened this objection, but presented it in its full vigour and strength: To which I shall clearly and distinctly answer thus:

First, Seasons and times do not alter the na-

ture and substance of things in themselves; though it may cause things to alter, as to the usefulness, or not usefulness of them.

Secondly, Things commanded and practised at certain times and seasons fall of themselves, when as the cause and ground, for which they were commanded, is removed; as there is no need now for the decision about circumcision, seeing there are none contend for it: neither as to the orders concerning things offered to idols, seeing there is now no such occasion: Yet who will say, that the command enjoined in the same place, Acts xv. 20. To abstain from fornication, is now made void; seeing there is daily need for its standing in force, because it yet remains as a temptation man is incident to? we confess, indeed, we are against such as from the bare letter of the scripture (though if it were seasonable now to debate it, we find but few to deal with, whose practices are so exactly squared) seek to uphold customs, forms or shadows, when the use, for which they were appointed, is removed, or the substance itself known and witnessed; as we have sufficiently elsewhere answered our opposers in the case of water-baptism, and bread and wine, &c. So that the objection, as to that, doth not hold; and the difference is very wide, in respect of such things: the very nature and substance of which can never be dispensed with by the people of God, so long as they are in this world; yea, without which they could not be his people. For the doctrines, and fundamental principles of the Christian faith, we own and believe originally and principally, because they are

the truths of God ; whereunto the Spirit of God in our hearts hath constrained our understandings to obey and submit. In the second place, we are greatly confirmed, strengthened and comforted in the joint testimony of our brethren, the apostles and disciples of Christ, who by the revelation of the same Spirit in the days of old believed, and have left upon record the same truths ; so we having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken ; we also believe, and therefore we speak. And we deny not but some, that from the letter have had the notion of these things, have thereby in the mercy of God received occasion to have them revealed in the life : for we freely acknowledge (though often calumniated to the contrary) that whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning ; that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures may have hope. So then I hope, if the Spirit of God lead me now unto that which is good, profitable, yea, and absolutely needful, in order to the keeping my conscience clear and void of offence towards God and man, none will be so unreasonable as to say, I ought not to do it, because it is according to the scriptures. Nor do I think it will savour ill among any serious, solid Christians, for me to be the more confirmed and persuaded that I am led to this thing by the Spirit, that I find it in myself good and useful ; and that upon the like occasions Christ *commanded* it, and the apostles and primitive Christians practised and recommended it.

Now, seeing it is so that we can boldly say,

with a good conscience in the sight of God, that the same Spirit, which leads us to believe the doctrines and principles of the truth, and to hold and maintain them again, after the apostacy, in their primitive and ancient purity, as they were delivered by the apostles of Christ in the Holy Scriptures; I say, that the same Spirit doth now lead us into the like holy order and government to be exercised among us, as it was among them, being now the like occasion and opportunity ministered to us; therefore, what can any Christianly or rationally object against it? For that there is a real cause for it, the thing itself speaketh; and that it was the practice of the saints and church of old, is undeniable: what kind of ground then can any such opposers have, (being such, as scrupling at this, do, notwithstanding, acknowledge our principle) that this were done by imposition or imitation, more than the belief of the doctrines and principles? Seeing as it is needful to use all diligence to convince and persuade people of the truth, and bring them to the belief of it, (which yet we cannot do, but as truth moves and draws in their hearts,) it is also no less needful, when a people is gathered, to keep and preserve them in unity and love, as becomes the Church of Christ; and to be careful, as saith the apostle, That all things be done decently, and in order; and that all that is wrong be removed according to the method of the gospel; and the good cherished and encouraged. So that we conclude, and that upon very good grounds, That there ought now, as well as heretofore, to be order and government in the Church of Christ.

That which now cometh to be examined in the third place is,

First, What is the order and government we plead for?

Secondly, In what cases, and how far it may extend? And in whom the power decisive is?

Thirdly, How it differeth, and is wholly another than the oppressive and persecuting principality of the church of Rome, and other anti-christian assemblies?

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SECTION IV.

Of the order and government which we plead for.

It will be needful then, before I proceed to describe the order and government of the church, to consider what is or may be properly understood by the church: for some (as I touched before) seem to be offended, or at least afraid of the very word; because the power of the church, the order of the church, the judgment of the church, and such like pretences, have been the great weapons wherewith antichrist and the apostate Christians have been these many generations persecuting the woman, and warring against the man-child. And, indeed, great disputes have been among the learned Rabbies, in the apostacy concerning this church, what it is, or what may be so accounted; which I find not my place at present to dive much in, but shall only give the true sense of it, according to truth, and the scriptures plain testimony.

The word church in itself, and as used in the scriptures, is no other but a gathering, company, or assembly of certain people, called or gathered together: for so the Greek word signifies, (which is that the translators render church) which word is derived from the verb *Evoco*, I call out of, from the root *Voco*, I call. Now though the English word church be only taken in such a sense, as people are gathered together upon a religious account; yet the Greek word, that is so rendered, is taken in general for every gathering, or meeting together of people: and therefore where it is said, The town clerk of the Ephesians dismissed the tumult, that was gathered there together, the same Greek word is used, Acts xix. 41. he dismissed the assembly, (or the church.)

A church, then, in the scripture-phrase, is no other than a meeting or gathering of certain people, which, (if it be taken in a religious sense, as most commonly it is) are gathered together in the belief of the same principles, doctrines and points of faith, whereby as a body they become distinguished from others, and have a certain relation among themselves; and a conjunct interest to the maintaining and propagating these principles they judge to be right: And therefore have a certain care and oversight over one another, to prevent and remove all occasions that may tend to break this their conjunct interest, hinder the propagation of it, or bring infamy, contempt, or contumely upon it; or give such as on the other hand are, or may be banded together to undo them, just occasion against them, to decry and defame them.

Now the way to distinguish that church, gathering, or assembly of people, whereof Christ truly is the head, from such as falsely pretend thereto, is by considering the principles and grounds upon which they are gathered together, the nature of that hierarchy and order they have among themselves, the way and method they take to uphold it, and the bottom upon which it standeth; which will greatly contribute to clear all mistakes.

Forasmuch as sanctification and holiness is the great and chief end among true Christians, which moves them to gather together; therefore the apostle Paul defines the Church in his salutation to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. i. 2. Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. So the church is such as are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.

The power and authority, order and government we speak of, is such, as a church, meeting, gathering or assembly claims towards those that have, or do declare themselves members, who own, believe and profess the same doctrines and principles of Faith with us, and go under the same distinction and denomination; whose escapes, faults and errors may by our adversaries justly be imputed to us, if not seasonably and Christianly reproved, reclaimed or condemned. For we are not so foolish, as to concern ourselves with those who are not of us; far less, who stand in opposition to us, so as to reprove, instruct, or reclaim them as fellow-members or brethren: Yet, with a respect to remove the general reproach

from the Christian name, with a tender regard to the good of their immortal souls, for the zeal we owe to God's glory, and for the exaltation and propagation of his everlasting truth and gospel in the earth, we have not been wanting, with the hazard of our lives, to seek the scattered ones, holding forth the living and sure foundation, and inviting and persuading all to obey the gospel of Christ, and to take notice of his reproofs, as he makes himself manifest in and by his light in their hearts. So our care and travel is, and hath been towards those that are without, that we may bring them into the fellowship of the saints in light; and towards those that are brought in, that they might not be led out again, or drawn aside, either to the left-hand, or the right, by the workings and temptations of the enemy.

These things being thus cleared and opened, we do positively affirm, that we being a people gathered together by the power of God (which most, if not all of those, that arising among ourselves do oppose us herein, have acknowledged) into the belief of certain principles and doctrines, and also certain practices and performances, by which we are come to be separated and distinguished from others, so as to meet apart, and also to suffer deeply for our joint testimony; there are and must of necessity be, as in the gathering of us, so in the preserving of us while gathered, diversities of gifts and operations for the edifying of the whole body. Hence, saith the apostle, 1 Tim. v. 17. Let the elders, that rule well, be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine: and this we

suppose neither to be popish nor antichristian, let our opposers say it as oft as they can, without reckoning the apostles such.

Secondly, Forasmuch as all are not called in the same station; some rich; some poor, some servants, some masters, some married, some unmarried, some widows, and some orphans, and so forth; it is not only convenient, but absolutely needful, that there be certain meetings at certain places and times, as may best suit the conveniencies of such, who may be most particularly concerned in them; where both those that are to take care may assemble, and those who may need this care, may come and make known their necessities, and receive help, whether by counsel or supply, according to their respective needs. This doth not at all contradict the principle of being led inwardly and immediately by the Spirit; else how came the apostle in that day of the powerful pouring forth of the Spirit of God, to set apart men for this purpose? Sure, this was not to lead them from their inward guide; yea, on the contrary, it is expressly said, Acts vi. 3. Look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. Sure they were not to undertake a business, being full of the Holy Ghost, which might import a contradiction to their being led by it: so we see it is both fit and suitable to the apostle's doctrine, to have meetings about business. Now if any should be so whimsical or conceited, as to scruple their being at set places and times, though these be nothing relative to the essential parts, but only circumstances re-

lating to the conveniency of our persons, (which we must have regard to, so long as we are clothed with flesh and blood: and such notionists, as are against this godly care, work far more in their vain imaginations, than they reduce to practice; being like unto such of whom the apostle James testified, who content themselves, with saying to the naked, be clothed; and to the hungry, be fed; while they offer not, in the least, to minister to them those things which are needful for clothing and feeding of them.) Yet shall we not scruple to make it appear, that it is not without very good ground that we both appoint places and times. And first, as to the place, I say as before, it is with our bodies we must meet, as well as with our spirits; and so, of necessity, we must convey our bodies unto one place, that we may speak and act in those things we meet for: And that must be in some certain place, where all must know where to find it; having herein a regard to the conveniencies and occasions of such as meet. Were it fit, that those of the church of Corinth should go do their business at Antioch, or the Church of Jerusalem at Rome? Nay, surely, God hath not given us our reason to no purpose; but that we should make use of it for his glory, and the good of our brethren, yet always in subjection to his power and spirit. And therefore we have respect to these things in the appointing of our meetings, and do it not without a regard to the Lord, but in a sense of his fear. And so the like as to times, which is no contradicting of the inward leading of the Spirit. Else how came the apostle to appoint a time to the

Corinthians in their contributions, desiring them, 1 Cor. xvi. 2. To lay by them in store upon the first day of the week; yea, saith he not, that he gave the same order to the church of Galatia. I know not how any in reason can quarrel about *set times* for outward business, it being done in a subjection to God's will, as all things ought to be; or else how can such as so do, but quarrel with the apostle for this imposition (at that rate) upon the churches of Corinth and Galatia? We appoint no set times for the performance of the worship of God, so as to appoint men to preach and pray at such and such set times; though we appoint times to meet together in the name of the Lord, that we may feel his presence, and he may move in and through whom he pleaseth, without limitation. Which practice of meeting together we are greatly encouraged to by the promise of Christ, and our own blessed experience; and also we are severely prohibited to lay it aside by the holy apostle; and also, on the other hand, by the sad experience of such as by negligence or prejudice forsake the assemblies of God's people; upon many of which is already fulfilled, and upon others daily fulfilling, the judgments threatened upon such transgressors; read Heb. x. from verse 23 to the end; where that duty is so seriously exhorted to, and the contempt of it reckoned a wilful sin, almost (if not altogether) unpardonable; yea, a treading under foot the Son of God, and a doing despite to the Spirit of Grace; which is fulfilled in our day, and proves the lamentable fruits of such as have so backslidden among us. And therefore having

so much good and real ground for what we do herein, together with the approbation and encouragement of Christ and his apostles, both by command and practice, we can (as that both the Alpha and Omega, the foundation and cap-stone required) faithfully affirm in good conscience, that God hath led us by his Spirit, both to appoint places and times, where we may see the faces one of another; and to take care one for another, provoking one another to love and good works. And our faith and confidence herein cannot be staggered by a mere denial in our opposers, which no man of conscience and reason will say it ought; seeing the thing itself hath such a solid and real cause and foundation, so good and suitable a pattern and example, and that it is constantly confirmed to us, both by the testimony of God's Spirit in our hearts, and by the good fruits and effects which we daily reap thereby, as a seal and confirmation that God is well pleased therewith, and approveth us in it.

Having thus far proceeded to show that there ought to be order and government among the people of God, and that that which we plead for is, that there may be certain meetings set apart for that end; it is next to be considered, in what cases, and how far it may extend.

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SECTION V.

In what Cases, and how far this Government extends. And first, as to outwards and temporals.

I shall begin with that, which gave the first rise for this order among the apostles; and I do

verily believe, might have been among the first occasions that gave the like among us, and that is, The care of the poor; of widows and orphans. Love and compassion are the great, yea, and the chiefest marks of Christianity. Hereby shall it be known, saith Christ, that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another. And James the apostle places religion herein in the first place: Pure religion, saith he, and undefiled before God and the Father is, to visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions, &c. For this then, as one main end, do we meet together, that enquiry may be made, if there be any poor of the household of faith that need, that they may be supplied; that the widows may be taken care of; that the orphans and fatherless may be bred up and educated. Who will be so unchristian, as to reprove this good order and government, and to say it is needless? But if any will thus object, May not the Spirit lead every one of you to give to them that need? What needs meeting about it, and such formalities?

I answer, The Spirit of God leads us so to do; what can they say to the contrary? Nor is this a practice any ways inconsistent with being inwardly and immediately led by the Spirit; for the Spirit of God doth now, as well as in the days of old, lead his people into those things which are orderly, and of a good report; for he is the God of order, and not of confusion: And therefore the holy apostles judged it no inconsistency with their being led by the spirit, to appoint men full of the Holy Ghost, and of wisdom, over the business of the poor. Now if to be full

of the Holy Ghost be a qualification needful for this employment; surely the nature of their employment was not to render this so needful a qualification useless and ineffectual, as if they were not to be led by it.

Moreover we see, though they were at that time all filled with the Spirit, yet there was something wanting before this good order was established. There was a murmuring that some widows were neglected in the daily ministration; and we must not suppose the apostles went about to remedy this evil that was creeping into the Church, without the counsel of God by his Spirit, or that this remedy they were led to, was stepping into apostacy; neither can it be so said of us, we proceeding upon the like occasion.

If then it be thus needful and suitable to the gospel, to relieve the necessities of the poor, that as there was no beggar to be among Israel of old, so far less now; must there not be meetings to appoint contributions, in order to the performing these things? Which is no other, but the giving of a general intimation what the needs are, that every one, as God moves their hearts, and hath prospered them, (without imposition, force, or limitation) may give towards these needful uses. In which case these murmurers at our good order in such matters may well think strange at the apostle: How pressingly! how earnestly doth he reiterate his desires and provocations, so to speak, in this respect to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. xvi. 2. and the eighth and ninth chapters of the second epistle throughout!

Now, though he testifies to them elsewhere,

That they are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and that the Spirit of God dwells in them; yet ceaseth he not to entreat and exhort, yea, and to give them certain orders in this matter.

Besides all these reasons, which are sufficient to convince any unprejudicate man, the secret approbation of God's Spirit accompanying us in this thing, together with the fruits and effects of it; which hundreds can witness to, whose needs have been supplied, and themselves helped through divers difficulties; and the testimonies of some already, and of many more orphans and fatherless children, who have found no want, neither of father nor mother, or other relations, through the tender love and care of God's people, in putting them to trades and employments, and giving them all needful education: which will make it appear, ere this age pass away, to those that have an eye to see, that these are not the mere doings and orders of men; but the work of him who is appearing in ten thousands of his saints, to establish not only truth, but mercy and righteousness in the earth.

And for that end therefore, in the second place, this order reacheth the making up and composing of differences as to outward things, which may fall out betwixt friend and friend; for such things may fall out through the intricacies of divers affairs, where neither hath any positive intention to injure and defraud his neighbour, as in many cases might be instanced. Or if through the workings and temptations of him, whose work is to beset the faithful, and people of the Lord, and to engender, (so far as he can) strife and division

among them, any should so step aside, as to offer to wrong or prejudice his neighbour; we do boldly aver, as a people gathered together by the Lord, unto the same faith, and distinguished from all others by our joint-testimony and sufferings, that we have power and authority to decide and remove these things among ourselves, without going to others to seek redress. And this in itself hath so much reason, that I cannot tell if any, that are not wholly prejudicate or obstinate, can blame it. For if we be of one mind concerning faith and religion, and that it be our joint interest to bring all others unto the same truth with us, as supposing them to be wrong, what confidence can we have to think of reclaiming them, if the truth we profess have not such efficacy as to reconcile us among ourselves in the matters of this world: if we be forced to go out to others for equity and justice, because we cannot find it among ourselves, how can we expect to invite them to come among us, when such virtues, as which still accompany the truth, are necessarily supposed to be wanting? Should we affirm otherwise, it were to destroy the truth and faith we have been, and are, in the Lord's hand, building up: and indeed the spirit and practice of such as oppose us herein, hath no less tendency.

Moreover, besides the enforcing and intrinsic reason of this thing, we have the concurrence, approbation and comfort of the apostle's testimony, 1 Cor. vi. Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? If it be objected, Do you reckon all unjust that are not of you? Think ye all other people void of justice?

I answer, though the apostle useth this expression, I am persuaded he did not reckon all others unjust, that had not received then the Christian faith. There were, no doubt, moral and just men among the heathen; and therefore the same Paul commends the nobility of Festus. He there reckons them unjust in respect of the saints, or comparatively with them, as such as are not come to the just principle of God in themselves, to obey it and follow it: and therefore though he accounts them, who are least esteemed in the church, capable to decide such matters: yet he supposeth it safer to submit to their judgment in such cases, though it were by taking wrong, or suffering wrong, than to go before others to the greater reproach of the truth. We hope, though many occasions of the kind have fallen in among us, since we have been a people, none have had just occasion to decline our judgment. And though some should suppose themselves to be wronged; yet if they should bring their matter before others, we might say, as the apostle saith in the fore-mentioned chapter, ver. 7. This were thereby a fault in them, and would evidence a greater care of some outward concern, than of the honour and interest of truth; and therefore such as have a tender regard that way, would rather suffer what, to their apprehensions, may seem wrong. For in matters wherein two parties are opposite in the case of *Meum* and *Tuum*, it is somewhat hard to please both; except were the power of truth, and the righteous judgment thereof reaching to that of God in the conscience, hath brought to a true acknowledg-

ment him that hath been mistaken, or in the wrong; which hath frequently fallen out among us, to the often refreshing and confirming our souls in the certain belief, that Christ was fulfilling his promises among us. In restoring judges, as at the first, and counsellors, as in the beginning.

Now, suppose any should be so pettish, or humorous, as not to agree in such matters to the judgment of his brethren, and to go before the unbelievers (for though I reckon them not such unbelievers as the heathen of old, because they profess a faith in God and Christ; yet I may safely say, they are unbelievers as to these principles and doctrines, which we know are the truth of God; and in that sense must be unbelievers as to him, that so appealeth to them from his brethren.) I say, such as so do, first commit a certain hurt, and evil, in staining the honour and reputation of the truth they profess, which ought to be dearer to us than our lives. And even in that outward matter, for which they thus do, they run a hazard, not knowing whether things shall carry, as they expect: if they lose, they have a double prejudice; if they gain, it is at too dear rate, even with the hurt of truth's reputation, which their outward advantage cannot make up. If then it be unlawful to do evil, that good may come of it, even a spiritual good; far less is it lawful to do a positive evil, of so deep a dye as to bring an evil report upon the good land, and give the uncircumcised an occasion to rejoice: out of the uncertain hope of an outward gain, it is far better to suffer loss, as the

apostle very well argues in the place above-mentioned.

Indeed, if there be any such, who have been, or appear to be of us, as suppose, There is not a wise man among us all, nor an honest man, that is able to judge betwixt his brethren; we shall not covet to meddle in their matter, being persuaded, that either they, or their cause is nought. Though (praises to God) among all those that have gone from us, either upon one account or other, I never heard that any were so minded towards us; but the most part of them having let in the offence of some things, or persons, have had this unanimous testimony concerning us, that generally we are an honest and upright-hearted people.

But whatever sense our enemies, or apostates have of us, who look askint on the face of truth, and can see nothing aright in those they love not, or are prejudicate against: this we can say, in the last place (besides the reasons and Scripture above declared) that the good fruits, and effects which daily abound to the household of faith, in this, as well as the other parts of the government the Lord is establishing among us, doth more and more commend it unto us; and confirmeth our hearts in the certain belief of that, which we can confidently testify in good conscience, that God hath led us hereunto by his Spirit; and we see the hand of the Lord herein, which in due time will yet more appear; that, as through our faithful testimony in the hand of the Lord, that antichristian and apostatised generation, the *national ministry*, hath received a deadly blow by our discovering

and witnessing against their forced maintainance, and tythes, against which we have testified by many cruel sufferings of all kinds, (as our chronicles shall make known to generations to come) so that their kingdom, in the hearts of thousands, begins to totter and lose its strength, and shall assuredly fall to the ground, through truth's prevailing in the earth; so on the other hand do we by coming to righteousness and innocency, weaken the strength of their kingdom, who judge for rewards (as well as such as preach for hire) and by not ministering occasion to those, who have heaped up riches, and lived in excess, lust and riot, by feeding and preying upon the iniquities and contentions of the people. For as truth and righteousness prevails in the earth, by our faithful witnessing and keeping to it, the nations shall come to be eased and disburdened of that deceitful tribe of lawyers (as well as priests) who, by their many tricks and endless intricacies, have rendered justice, in their method, burdensome to honest men, and seek not so much to put an end, as to foment controversies and contentions, that they themselves may be still fed and upheld, and their trade kept up. Whereas by truth's propagation, as many of these controversies will die by mens' coming to be less contentious; so when any difference ariseth, the saints giving judgment without gift or reward, or running into the tricks and endless labyrinths of the lawyers, will soon compose them. And this is that we are persuaded the Lord is bringing about in our day, though many do not, and many will not see it; because it is indeed in a way different and contrary to men's wis-

dom, who are now despising Christ in his inward appearance, because of the meanness of it, as the Jews of old did him in his outward: yet notwithstanding there were some then that did witness, and could not be silent, but must testify that He was come; even so now are there thousands that can set to their seal, that he hath now again the second time appeared, and is appearing in ten thousands of his saints; in and among whom (as a first fruits of many more that shall be gathered) he is restoring the golden age, and bringing them into the holy order and government of his own son, who is ruling, and to rule in the midst of them, setting forth the counsellors as at the beginning, and judges as at first; and establishing truth, mercy, righteousness and judgment again in the earth: Amen, hallelujah!

Thirdly, These meetings take care in the case of marriages, that all things be clear; and that there may be nothing done in that procedure, which afterwards may prove to the prejudice of truth, or of the parties concerned; which being an outward thing (that is acknowledged in itself to be lawful) of the greatest importance a man or woman can perform in this world; and from the sudden, unwary, or disorderly procedure whereof, very great snares and reproaches may be cast both upon the parties, and the profession owned by them; therefore it doth very fitly, among other things, when it occurs, come to be considered of by the people of God, when met, to take care to preserve all things right and savoury in the household of Faith. We do believe, our adversaries, that watch

for evil against us, would be glad how promiscuously or disorderly we proceeded in this weighty matter, that so they might the more boldly accuse us, as overturners of all human and Christian order: but God hath not left us without his counsel and wisdom in this thing; nor will he, that any should receive just occasion against us his people: and therefore in this weighty concern, we, who can do nothing against the truth, but all for, and with regard to the truth, have divers testimonies for the Lord. And,

First, That we cannot marry with those that walk not in, and obey not the truth, as being of another judgment or fellowship; or pretending to it, walk not suitably and answerable thereto.

Secondly, Nor can we go to the hireling priests, to uphold their false and usurped authority; who take upon them to marry people without any command or precedent for it from the law of God.

Lastly, Nor can we suffer any such kind of marriages to pass among us; which, either as to the degress of consanguinity, or otherwise, in itself is unlawful, or from which there may be any just reflection cast upon our way.

As to the first two, they being matter of principle received and believed, it is not my work here to debate them; only since they are received and owned as such (for which we can, and have given our sufficient reasons elsewhere, as for our other principles) we ought to care how any by walking otherwise, bring reproach upon us; yet not to pass them wholly by, as to the first. Besides the testimony of the Spirit of God in our hearts (which is the original ground of our faith in all

things) we have the testimony of the apostle Paul, 2 Cor. vi. 14. Be ye not unequally yoked together, &c. Now if any should think it were much from this Scripture to plead it absolutely unlawful, in any case, to join in marriage with any (however otherwise sober) because of their not being one with us in all things, I shall speak my judgment. To me it appears so; and to many more who have obtained mercy; and we think we have the Spirit of God. But whether it be lawful or not, I can say positively, It is not expedient, neither doth it edify, and (as that which is of dangerous consequence) doth give justly offence to the Church of Christ: and therefore no true tender heart will prefer his private love to the good and interest of the whole body.

As for the second, In that we deny the priests their assumed authority and power to marry, it is that which in no wise we can recede from, nor can we own any in the doing of it; it being a part of our testimony against the usurpations of that generation, who never yet, that I ever heard of, could produce any Scripture proof or example for it. And seeing none can pretend conscience in the matter (for they themselves confess that it is no part of the essence of marriage) if any, pretending to be among us, should through fear, interest, or prejudice to the truth, come under, and bow to, that image, have we not reason to deny such slavish and ignoble spirits, as mind not truth and its testimony?

Lastly, Seeing if any walking with us, or going under the same name, should hastily or disorderly go together, either being within the degrees of

consanguinity, which the law of God forbids, or that either party should have been formerly under any tie or obligation to others, or any other vast disproportion, which might bring a just reflection upon us from our opposers; can any blame us for taking care to prevent these evils, by appointing that such, as so design, make known their intentions to these churches or assemblies, where they are most known, that if any know just cause of hindrance, it may be mentioned, and a timely let put to the hurt, either by stopping it, if they can be brought to condescend; or by refusing to be witnesses and concurrers with them in it, if they will not? For we take not upon us to hinder any to marry, otherwise than by advice, or disconcerting ourselves; neither do we judge, that such as do marry contrary to our mind, that therefore their marriage is null and void in itself, or may be dissolved afterwards; nay, all our meddling is in a holy care for the truth. For if the thing be right, all that we do is to be witnesses; and if otherwise, that we may say for our vindication to such as may upbraid us therewith, that we *advised otherwise*, and did no ways concur in the matter; that so they may bear their own burden, and the truth and people of God be cleared.

Now I am confident that our way herein is so answerable to reason and Christianity, that none will blame us therefor; except either such, whose irregular and impatient lusts cannot suffer a serious and Christian examination, and an advised and moderate procedure; or such, who watching for evil against us, are sorry we should proceed

so orderly, and would rather we should suffer all manner of irregularities and abominations, that they might have the more to say against us. But the solid and real reasons we have for our way herein, will sufficiently plead for us in the hearts of all sober men; and moreover, the testimony of God's Spirit in our hearts doth abundantly confirm us both against the folly of the one, and the envy of the other.

Fourthly, There being nothing more needful, than to preserve men and women in righteousness, after they are brought into it; and also nothing more certain, than that the great enemy of man's soul seeks daily how he may draw back again, and catch those who have in some measure escaped his snares, and known deliverance from them; therefore do we also meet together, that we may receive an opportunity to understand, if any have fallen under his temptations, that we may restore them again, if possible; or otherwise separate them from us. Surely, if we did not so, we might be justly blamed as such, among whom it were lawful to commit any evil unreprieved; indeed this were to be guilty of that libertinism which some have falsely accused us of, and which hath been our care all along, as became the people of God, to avoid; therefore, we have sought always to keep the house clean, by faithfully reproofing and removing, according to the nature of the offence, and the scandal following thereupon; private things privately, and public things publicly. We desire not to propagate hurt, and defile people's minds, with telling them such things as tend not to edify; yet do we

not so cover over, or smooth over any wickedness, as not to deal roundly with the persons guilty, and causing them to take away the scandal in their acknowledgment before all, to whose knowledge it hath come: yet judge we not ourselves obliged to tell that in Gath, or publish that in the streets of Askelon, which make the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice; or strengthen Atheists and Ranters in their obduracy, who feed more upon the failings of the saints, than to imitate their true repentance. And therefore where we find an unfeigning returning to the Lord, we desire not to remember that which the Lord hath forgotten, nor yet to throw offences in the way of the weak, that they may stumble upon them.

And therefore I conclude, that our care as to these things also is most needful, and a part of that order and government, which the church of Christ never was, nor can be *without*; as doth abundantly appear by divers scriptures heretofore mentioned.



SECTION VI.

How far this government doth extend in matters spiritual and purely conscientious.

THUS far I have considered the order and government of the church, as it respects outward things; and its authority in condemning or removing such things, which in themselves are evil, as being those, which none will readily jus-

tify: the necessity of which things is such, that few but will acknowledge the care and order in these cases to be commendable and expedient.

Now I come to consider the things of another kind, which either verily are, or are supposed to be matters of CONSCIENCE, or at least, wherein people may lay claim to *conscience*, in the acting or forbearing of them. In which the great question is, How far in such cases the church may give positive orders or rules? How far her authority reacheth, or may be supposed to be binding, and ought to be submitted to? For the better clearing and examination of which, it will be fit to consider,

First, Whether the Church of Christ hath power in any cases that are matters of conscience, to give a positive sentence, and decision, which may be obligatory upon believers?

Secondly, If so, in what cases and respects she may so do?

Thirdly, Wherein consists the freedom and liberty of conscience, which may be exercised by the members of the true church diversely, without judging one another?

And lastly, In whom the power decisive is, in case of controversy, or contention in such matters?—Which will also lead us to observe the vast difference betwixt us and the papists, and others in this particular.

As to the first, Whether the Church of Christ hath power in any cases, that are matters of conscience, to give a positive sentence and decision, which may be obligatory upon believers.

I answer affirmatively, she hath; and shall

prove it from divers instances, both from scripture and reason. For first, all principles and articles of faith, which are held doctrinally, are, in respect to those that believe them, matters of conscience. We know the papists do, out of conscience (such as are zealous among them) adore, worship and pray to Angels, Saints and Images, yea, and to the Eucharist, as judging it to be really Christ Jesus; and so do others place conscience in things that are absolutely wrong: now I say, we being gathered together into the belief of certain principles and doctrines, without any constraint or worldly respect, but by the mere force of truth upon our understandings, and its power and influence upon our hearts; these principles and doctrines, and the practices necessarily depending upon them are, as it were, the *terms* that have drawn us together, and the* *bond*, by which we became centred into one body and fellowship, and distinguished from others. Now if any one, or more, so engaged with us, should arise to teach any other doctrine or doctrines, contrary to these which were the ground of our being one; who can deny, but the body hath power in such a case to declare, This is not according to the truth we profess; and therefore we pronounce such and such doctrines to be wrong, with which we cannot have unity, nor

* Yet this is not so the bond, but that we have also a more inward and invisible, to wit, the life of righteousness, whereby we also have unity with the upright seed in all, even in those, whose understandings are not yet so enlightened. But to those who are once enlightened, this is as an outward bond; and if they suffer themselves to be darkened through disobedience, which as it does in the outward bond, so it doth in the inward.

yet any more spiritual fellowship with those that hold them? And so cut themselves off from being members, by dissolving the very bond by which they were linked to the body. Now this cannot be accounted *tyranny and oppression*, no more than in a civil society, if one of the society shall contradict one or more of the fundamental articles, upon which the society was contracted, it cannot be reckoned a breach or iniquity in the whole society to declare, that such contradictors have done wrong, and forfeited their right in that society; in case, by the original constitution, the nature of the contradiction implies such a forfeiture, as usually it is; and will no doubt hold in religious matters. As if a body be gathered into one fellowship, by the belief of certain principles, he that comes to believe otherwise, naturally scattereth himself; for that the cause, that gathered him, is taken away: and so those that abide constant in declaring the thing to be so as it is, and in looking upon him, and witnessing of him to others (if need be) to be such, as he has made himself, do him no injury. I shall make the supposition in the general, and let every people make the application to themselves, abstracting from us; and then let conscience and reason in every impartial reader declare, whether or not it doth not hold? Suppose a people really gathered unto the belief of the true and certain principles of the gospel, if any of these people shall arise and contradict any of those fundamental truths, whether has not such as stand, good right to cast such an one out from among them, and to pronounce, positively, This is contrary to the truth we pro-

fess and own; and therefore ought to be rejected, and not received, nor yet he that asserts it as one of us? And is not this obligatory upon all the members, seeing all are concerned in the like care as to themselves, to hold the right and shut out the wrong? I cannot tell, if any man of reason can well deny this: however, I shall prove it next from the testimony of the scripture.

Gal. i. 8. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. 1 Tim. i. 19, 20. Holding faith and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith, have made shipwreck. Of whom is Hymenæus and Alexander, whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

2 John x. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him rejoice. (For so the Greek hath it.)

These Scriptures are so clear and plain in themselves, as to this purpose, that they need no great exposition to the unbiassed and unprejudicate reader. For seeing it is so, that in the true church there may men arise, and speak perverse things, contrary to the doctrine and gospel already received; what is to be the place of those that hold the pure and ancient truth? must they look upon these perverse men still as their brethren? must they cherish them as fellow members, or must they judge, condemn and deny them? We

must not think the apostle wanted charity, who will have them accursed; and that gave Hymenæus and Alexander over to Satan, after that they had departed from the true faith, that they might learn not to blaspheme. In short, if we must (as our opposers herein acknowledge) preserve and keep those that are come to own the truth, by the same means they were gathered and brought into it, we must not cease to be plain with them, and tell them, when they are wrong; and by sound doctrine both exhort and convince gainsayers. If the apostles of Christ of old, and the preachers of the everlasting gospel in this day, had told all people, however wrong they found them in their faith and principles, Our charity and love is such, we dare not judge you, nor separate from you; but let us all live in love together, and every one enjoy his own opinion, and all will be well: how should the nations have been; or what way can they be brought to truth and righteousness? would not the devil love this doctrine well, by which, darkness and ignorance, error and confusion might still continue in the earth unreprieved and uncondemned; if it was needful then for the apostles of Christ in the days of old to reprove, without sparing to tell the high-priests and great professors among the Jews, that they were stubborn and stiff-necked, and always resisted the Holy Ghost, without being guilty of imposition and oppression, or want of true love and charity; and also for those messengers the Lord raised up in this day, to reprove and cry out against the hireling priests, and to tell the world openly, both professors and profane, that they

were in darkness and ignorance, out of the truth, strangers and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel; if God has gathered a people, by this means, into the belief of one and the same truth, must not they, if they turn and depart from it, be admonished, reprov'd and condemned (yea, rather than those that are not yet come to the truth,) because they crucify afresh unto themselves the Lord of glory, and put him to open shame? It seems the apostle judged it very needful they should be so dealt with, Tit. i. 10. when he says, There are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, especially they of the circumcision, *whose mouths must be stopped, &c.* Were such a principle to be received or believed, that in the Church of Christ no man should be separated from, no man condemned or excluded the fellowship and communion of the body, for his judgment or opinion in matters of faith, then what blasphemies so horrid, what heresies so damnable, what doctrines of devils, but might harbour itself in the Church of Christ? What need then of sound doctrine, if no doctrine make unsound? What need of convincing and exhorting gainsayers, if to gainsay be no crime? Where should the unity of the faith be? Were not this an inlet to all manner of abomination; and to make void the whole tendency of Christ, and his apostles' doctrine; and render the gospel of none effect; and give a liberty to the unconstant and giddy will of man to innovate, alter and overturn it at his pleasure? So that from all that is above mentioned, we do safely conclude, that where a people are gathered together into the belief of the

principles and doctrines of the gospel of Christ, if any of that people shall go from their principles, and assert things false and contrary to what they have already received; such as stand and abide firm in the faith, have power, by the Spirit of God, after they have used Christian endeavours to convince and reclaim them, upon their obstinacy, to separate from such, and to exclude them from their spiritual fellowship and communion: For otherwise, if this be denied, farewell to all Christianity, or to the maintaining of any sound doctrine in the Church of Christ.

But, secondly, taking it for granted, that the Church of Christ, or assembly of believers, may, in some cases, that are matter of conscience, pronounce a positive *sentence* and *judgment* without hazard of imposition upon the members, it comes to be enquired; In what cases, and how far this power reacheth?

I answer, First, As that which is most clear and undeniable, in the fundamental principles and doctrines of faith, in case any should offer to teach otherwise, as is above declared and proved. But some may perhaps acknowledge, that indeed if any should contradict the known and owned principles of truth, and teach otherwise, it were fit to cast out and exclude such; but what judgest thou as to lesser matters, as in principles of less consequence, or in outward ceremonies or gestures, whether it be fit to press uniformity in these things? For answer to this, it is fit to consider,

First, The nature of the things themselves.

Secondly, The spirit and ground they proceed from.

And thirdly, The consequence and tendency of them.

But before I proceed upon these, I affirm, and that according to truth, that as the church and assembly of God's people may, and hath power to decide by the Spirit of God in matters fundamental and weighty, (without which no decision nor decree in whatever matters is available) so the same church and assembly also, in other matters of less moment, as to themselves (yet being needful and expedient with a respect to the circumstance of time, place and other things that may fall in) may and hath power by the same spirit, and not otherwise, being acted, moved and assisted, and led by it thereto, to pronounce a positive judgment: which, no doubt, will be found obligatory upon all such who have a sense and feeling of the mind of the Spirit, though rejected by such as are not watchful, and so are out of the feeling and unity of the life. And this is that which none that own immediate revelation, or a being inwardly led by the Spirit, to be now a thing expected or dispensed to the saints, can, without contradicting their own principle, deny; far less such with whom I have to do in this matter, who claiming this privilege to particulars; saying, That they being moved to do such and such things, though contrary to the mind and sense of their brethren, are not to be judged for it; adding, Why may it not be so, that God hath moved them to it? Now if this be a sufficient reason for them to suppose as to one or two, I may without absurdity suppose it as well to the whole body. And therefore as to the first, to wit,

The nature of the things themselves. If it be such a thing, the doing or not doing whereof, that is, either any act, or the forbearance of any, may bring a real reproach or ground of accusation against the truth professed and owned, and in and through which there may a visible schism and dissention arise in the church, by which truth's enemies may be gratified, and itself brought into disesteem; then it is fit for such, whose care is to keep all right, to take inspection in the matter, to meet together in the fear of God, to wait for his counsel and to speak forth his mind, according as he shall manifest himself in and among them. And this was the practice of the primitive church in the matter of circumcision. For here lay the debate: some thought it not needful to circumcise the Gentiles; others thought it a thing not to be dispensed with: and no doubt of these (for we must remember they were not the rebellious Jews, but such as had already believed in Christ) there were that did it out of conscience, as judging circumcision to be still obligatory. For they said thus, except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. Now what course took the church of Antioch in these cases? Acts xv. 2. They determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should go unto Jerusalem, unto the apostles and elders, about this question. We must not suppose they wanted the Spirit of God at Antioch to have decided the matter, neither that these apostles neglected or went from their inward guide in undertaking this journey; yet we see, they judged it meet in this matter to have the advice and con-

currence of the apostles and elders that were at Jerusalem; that they might be all of one mind in the matter. For there is no greater property of the Church of Christ, than pure unity in the Spirit; that is, a consenting and oneness in judgment and practices in matters of faith and worship (which yet admits of different measures, growths and motions, but never contrary and contradictory ones; and in these diversities of operations, yet still, by the same spirit, the true liberty is exercised, as shall be declared hereafter :) therefore prayeth Christ, That they all may be one, as he and the Father is one. To which purpose also let these following Scriptures be examined:

Rom. xii. 16. Be of the same mind one towards another.

1 Cor. i. 10. Now I beseech you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Ephes. v. 21. Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Phil. ii. 2. Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

And yet more remarkable is that of the apostle Paul to the Philippians, chap. iii. verse 15, Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

16. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

17. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an example.

So here, though the apostle grants forbearance in things wherein they have not yet attained; yet he concludes they must walk so, as they have him for an example, and so consequently not contrary, or otherwise. And therefore we conclude, that whereas any in the Church of God pretending conscience or revelation, shall arise to teach and practise (however insignificant or small in themselves) whether principles or practices, yet if they be contrary to such as are already received as true, and confirmed by God's Spirit in the hearts of the saints, and that the introducing of these things tend to bring reproach upon the truth, as such as are not edifying in themselves, and so stumble the weak; those who have a true and right discerning, may, in and by the power of God authorizing them (and no otherwise) condemn and judge such things: and they so doing it, it will be obligatory upon all the members that have a true sense, because they will feel it to be so, and therefore submit to it. And thus far as to the nature of the things themselves.

Secondly, As to the spirit and ground they proceed from. Whatsoever innovation, difference, or divers appearance, whether in doctrine or practice, proceedeth not from the pure moving of the Spirit of God, or is not done out of pure tenderness of conscience, but either from that, which being puft up, affecteth singularity, and there-through would be observed, commended and exalted; or from that, which is the malignity

of some humours and natural tempers, which will be contradicting without cause, and secretly begetting of divisions, animosities and emulations, by which the unity and unfeigned love of the brethren is lessened or rent; I say, all things proceeding from this root and spirit, however little they may be supposed to be of themselves, are to be guarded against, withstood and denied, as hurtful to the true church's peace, and a hindrance to the prosperity of truth.

If it be said, How know ye that these things proceed from that ground?

For answer, I make not here any application, as to particular persons or things; but if it be granted, (as it cannot be denied,) that there may arise persons in the true church, that may do such things from such a spirit, though pretending conscience and tenderness; then it must also be acknowledged, that such, to whom God hath given a true discerning by his Spirit, may and ought to judge such practices, and the spirit they come from, and have no unity with them; which if it be owned in the general, proves the case, to wit, That some pretending conscience in things seeming indifferent, but yet it proceeding in them from a spirit of singularity, emulation, or strife, those that have received a discerning thereof from the Lord, may and ought to judge the transgressors, without being accounted imposers, oppressors of conscience, or inforcers of uniformity, contrary to the the mind of Christ; against which the apostle also guarded the churches of old.

Phil. ii. 3. 4. Let nothing be done through

strife, or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other *better than themselves*.

Look not every man on his own-things; but every man also on the things of others.

Now, if it be an evil to do any thing out of strife; then such things that are seen so to be done, are they not to be avoided and forsaken? So that we are confident, our judgment herein cannot be denied, or reputed erroneous; except it be said, That none will or can arise in the Church of Christ, pretending such things from such a spirit; which I know not any that will, it being contrary to the express prophecies of the scripture, and the experience of the church in all ages, as may appear from Mat. xxiv. 24, Acts xv. 24. 1 Tim. iv. 1. 2 Tim. iii. 8. Mark xiii. 21. 22. 2 Pet. ii. 19. Or on the other hand, that those that abide faithful, and have a discerning of those evils ought to be silent, and never ought to reprove and gain-stand them, nor yet warn and guard others against them; and that it is a part of the commendable unity of the church of Christ, to suffer all such things without taking notice of them. I know none will say so; but if there be any so foolish as to affirm it, let them consider these scriptures, Gal. ii. 4. 1 Tim. i. 20. 2 Tim. ii. 24, 25. Tit. i. 9, 10, 11.

Now if none of these hold true; but, on the contrary, such evils have been, and may be found to creep in among the people of God, and that such as see them, may and ought to reprove them; then necessarily the doing so, is neither imposition, force nor oppression.

As to the third, concerning the consequence

and tendency of them, it is mostly included in the two former: for whatsoever tendeth not to edification, but, on the contrary, to destruction, and to beget discord among brethren, is to be avoided: according to that of the apostle, Rom. xvi. 17. Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them.

And since there is no greater mark of the people of God, than to be at peace among themselves; whatsoever tendeth to break that bond of love and peace, must be testified against. Let it be observed, I speak always of the Church of Christ indeed, and deal with such as are of another mind; not as reckoning only false churches not to have this power, but denying it even to the true Church of Christ, as judging it not fit for her so to act, as in relation to her members. For though Christ be the Prince of Peace, and doth most of all commend love and unity to his disciples; yet I also know he came not to send peace, but a sword, that is, in dividing man from the lusts and sins he hath been united to. And also it is the work of his disciples and messengers, to break the bands and unity of the wicked, wherein they are banded against God, and his truth, and the confederacy of such as stand in unrighteousness, by inviting and bringing as many as will obey, unto righteousness; whereby they become disunited and separated from their companions, with whom they were centred, and at peace, in the contrary and cursed nature. And indeed, blessed are they that are sent forth of

the Lord to scatter here, that they may gather into the unity of the life: and they are blessed that, in this respect, even for righteousness sake, are scattered and separated from their brethren; that they may come to know the brotherhood and fellowship, which is in the light; from which none ought to scatter, nor to be scattered, but be more and more gathered thereunto. And this leads me to what I proposed in the third place, under this head, of the true churches power in matters spiritual, or purely conscientious; which may be thus objected:

If thou plead so much for an oneness in the smallest matters, wherein consisteth the freedom and liberty of the conscience, which may be exercised by the members of the true church diversely, without judging one another?

In answer to this proposition, I affirm, first in general; that whatsoever things may be supposed to proceed from the same spirit, though diverse in its appearance, tending to the same end of edification, and which in the tendency of it, layeth not a real ground for division, or dissension of spirit, fellow-members ought not only to bear one another, but strengthen one another in them.

Now the respects wherein this may be, I can describe no better than the apostle Paul doth principally in two places, which therefore will be fit to consider at length for the opening of this matter; this being one of the weightiest points pertaining to this subject. Because, as on the one hand due forbearance ought to be exercised in its right place; so on the other, the many de-

vices and false pretences of the enemy creeping in here, ought to be guarded against.

The first is, 1 Cor. xii. from verse 4, to 31. thus:

4. Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.

5. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.

6. And there are diversities of operations; but it is the same God which worketh all in all.

7. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

8. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit.

9. To another faith by the same Spirit, to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit.

10. To another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.

11. But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally, as he will.

12. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many, are one body, so also is Christ.

13. For by one Spirit are we all baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

14. For the body is not one member, but many.

15. If the foot shall say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

16. And if the ear shall say, because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?

17. If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

18. But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

19. And if they were all one member, where were the body?

20. But now are they many members, yet but one body.

21. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you?

22. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary.

23. And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour, and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

24. For our comely parts have no need, but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked.

25. That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one of another.

26. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

27. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

28. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

29. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles?

30. Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

Which I would not have set down at large, but that there be some so careless, (especially in matters they like not) that they will scarce be at the pains seriously to read over a citation only named; and that also this being presented before the reader, in the current of the discourse, will fix the nature of my application the more in his understanding. For the apostle shows here the variety of the operations of the divers members of the body of Christ, working to one and the same end; as the divers members of a man's body towards the maintaining and upholding of the whole.

Now these are not placed in contrary workings, for so they would destroy one another; and so the apostle in the ordering of them in three several kinds proves this. First, diversities of gifts. Secondly, differences of administrations. Thirdly, diversities of operations: and that which is the bond that keeps the oneness, here he also mentions, to wit, The same Spirit, the same Lord, the same God; the apostle names nothing of contrariety or opposition. But lest any should be so critical, as to bring in here the school-distinction of contrarium oppositum, and contradictorium, I shall not deny, but contrariety or oppo-

sition, in the sense it is sometimes taken, may be found in the body without schism: as the comely parts may be said to be opposite or contrary to the uncomely, or the left-hand contrary to the right, or the foot opposite to the head, as the uppermost part to the undermost; or the doing a thing is contrary to the forbearing of it; but as for that which is acknowledged to be propositions, or termini contradictorii, that is, contradictory propositions, which are in themselves irreconcilable, whereof one must be still wrong, and that still destroy one another, and work contrary effects, they are not at all admitted, nor supposed to be in the body of Christ; as I shall give in one instance, verse 8. To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge, by the same Spirit. First, here are two different gifts, but not contrary. Secondly, There may something like contrariety, in the sense aforementioned, be here supposed; as, some may want this gift of wisdom and knowledge, and so to have is contrary to want, (though as to these two, none may be absolutely said to want them; yet all have them not in the same degree, as a special gift; though as to some gifts there may be an absolute want, as that of miracles, and interpretation of tongues.) But should I suppose such a contrariety, or more properly a contradiction, as to wisdom, to oppose folly, and to knowledge, utter ignorance; this were an opposition not to be admitted of in the body, because it were false to suppose that to proceed from the same spirit. And such contrarieties or diversities, as cannot justly be supposed to pro-

ceed from the same Spirit of God, which is the bond that links together, cannot be mutually entertained in the body; so the differences and diversities, which the apostle admits of, while he speaks largely in this matter, are, That none ought to be offended at his brother, that he hath not the same work and office in the body that he hath; but that every one keep in his own place, as God hath appointed them; that neither them that are set in a higher place, despise them that are set in a lower; nor them that are set in a lower, grudge and repine at such as are set higher; but all work in their proper place, towards the edification of the whole. And that the apostle intends this, is manifest, where he draws to a conclusion, verse 27, Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular, and God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, &c. and then he subsumes, Are all apostles, &c.

Which the same Paul again confirms, Ephes. iv. 8, 11, to the 17th, which was the second place I intended; and shall only mention, for brevity's sake, leaving the reader to consider of it at his leisure.

This is also held forth by the beloved disciple John in his three-fold distinction, 1 John ii. 12, 13, Of fathers, young men and little children: and by Peter, 1 Pet. v. 1, 5. in that of elders and younger. The true liberty then in the Church of Christ is exercised when as one judgeth not another in these different places; but live in love together, all minding the unity and general good of the body, and to work their own work in their

own place. Also the forbearance of the saints is exercised, when as they judge not one another for being found in the different appearance, either of doing or forbearing; which may be peculiar to their several places and stations in the body: for that there is, and may be diversities of works there, is excellently well expressed by the apostles, viz.

Rom. xii. 3. For I say through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

Verse 4. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:

Verse 5. So we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

Verse 6. Having then gifts differing, according to the grace that is given us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith:

Verse 7. Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching:

Verse 8. Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

If any then should quarrel with his brother, for exercising that which belongeth to the office of the body Christ hath called him to, and would force him to exercise the same office he doth, though he be not called to it; here is a

breach of Christian liberty, and an imposing upon it.

Now all schisms and jars fall out in this two-fold respect: either when any person or persons assume another, or an higher place in the body, than God will have them to be in, and so exercise an office, or go about to perform that, which they ought not to do; or when, as any truly exercising in their place, which God hath given them, others rise up and judge them, and would draw them from it; both of which cases have been, and may be supposed to fall out in the Church of Christ. As 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4. where some judged Paul wrongously; 3 John 9. where one exalting himself above his place, judged whom he ought not. We see then, what diversities be most usually in the Church of God, consisting in the difference of the gift proceeding from the same Spirit; and in the divers places, that the several members have in the same body for the edification of it; and every one being here in his own station, his standing therein is his strength and perfection; and to be in another, though higher and more eminent, would but weaken and hurt him: and so in this there ought to be a mutual forbearance, that there may neither be a coveting nor aspiring on the one hand, nor yet a despising or condemning on the other. But besides the forbearance of this nature, which is most ordinary and universal (and for the exercise whereof there is, and will still be a need, so long as there is any gathering or Church of Christ upon the earth) there is a certain liberty and forbearance also, that is more particular, and has a

relation to the circumstance of times and places, which will not hold universally; whereof we have the example of the primitive church, testified by the scriptures in two or three particulars. The first was, In suffering circumcision to the Jews for a time, and not only so, but also divers others of the legal and ceremonial purifications and customs, as may appear, Acts xxi. ver. 21, 22, 23, 24, &c. The second was, In the observation of certain days, Rom. xiv. 5. And the third, In the abstaining from meats, 1 Cor. viii. throughout: here the apostle persuades to, and recommends a forbearance, because of the weakness of some; for he says not any where, nor can it be found in all the scriptures of the gospel, that these things such weak ones were exercised in, were things indispensably necessary, or that it had been better for them, they had not been under such scruples, providing it had been from a principle of true clearness and so of faith.

Next again, these acts of forbearance were done in a condescension to the weakness of such, upon whom the ancient (and truly deserved in its season) veneration of the law had such a deep impression, that they could not yet dispense with all its ceremonies and customs: and to such the apostle holds forth a two-fold forbearance.

First, A certain compliance by such believers, as were gathered out from the Jews; though they saw over these things, yet it was fit they should condescend somewhat to their countrymen and brethren, who were weak.

Secondly, The like forbearance in the Gen-

tiles, not to judge them in these things ; but we see, that it was not allowed for such weak ones to propagate these scruples, or draw others into them ; and that when as any of the Churches of the Gentiles, who wanted this occasion, would have been exercising this liberty, or pleading for it, the apostle doth down-rightly condemn it, as I shall make appear in all the three instances above-mentioned.

First, In that of circumcision, Gal. v. 2, 4.

Behold I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing ; Christ is become of none effect unto you : whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace.

Can there be any thing more positive ? Might not some here have pretended tenderness of conscience, and have said ; Though the decree of the apostles do dispense with circumcision in me ; yet if I find a scruple in myself, and a desire to it out of tenderness, why should it be an evil in me to do it, more than in the Jews that believe ? We see, there is no room left here for such reasoning.

Secondly, As to observations, Gal. iv. 9, 10, 11. Might not they have answered, What if we regard a day to the Lord, must we not then ? are not these thy own words ? We see that did not hold here, because in them it was a returning to the beggarly elements.

Thirdly, As to meats, 1 Tim. iv. 3. Here we see that is accounted a doctrine of devils ; which in another respect was Christian forbearance. And therefore now, and that in the general res-

pect, he gives this reason, verse 4. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving of them that believe and know the truth. So we see, that in these particular things there is great need of wariness in the Church of Christ; for that sometimes forbearance under a pretence of liberty may be more hurtful than down-right judging. I suppose, if any should arise and pretend conscience, and claim a liberty for circumcision and the purifications of the law, whether all Christians would not with one voice condemn it? and so as to days and meats, how do the generality of Protestants judge it? Though I deny not but there may, and ought to be a mutual forbearance in the Church of Christ in certain such cases, which may fall in; and a liberty there is in the Lord, which breaks not the peace of the true church; but in such matters (as I observed at large before) both the nature of the things, the spirit they come from, and the occasion from whence, and their consequence and tendency is to be carefully observed.



SECTION VII.

Concerning the Power of decision.

SEEING then it may fall out in the Church of Christ, that both some may assume another place in the body than they ought, and others may lay claim to a liberty and pretend conscience in things they ought not, and that without question the wrong is not to be tolerated, but to be testi-

fied against, however specious its appearance may be; and that it must and ought to be judged: the question will arise, Who is the proper judge or judges, in whom resideth the power of deciding this controversy? And this is that which I undertook in the next place to treat of, as being the specific difference and distinguishing property of the Church of Christ from all other antichristian assemblies and churches of man's building and framing.

To give a short, and yet clear and plain answer to this proposition: The only proper judge of controversies in the church, is the Spirit of God, and the power of deciding solely lies in it; as having the only unerring, infallible and certain judgment belonging to it; which infallibility is not necessarily annexed to any persons, person or places whatsoever, by virtue of any office, place or station any one may have or have had in the body of Christ. That is to say, that any have ground to reason thus: Because I am or have been such an eminent member, therefore my judgment is infallible; or, because we are the greatest number; or, that we live in such a noted or famous place, or the like: though some of these reasons may, and ought to have their true weight in cases of contradictory assertions (as shall hereafter be observed) yet not so, as upon which either mainly, or only the infallible judgment is to be placed; but upon the Spirit, as that which is the firm unmoveable foundation.

And now, if I should go on no further, I have said enough to vindicate us from *imposition*, and from the tyranny, whether of Popery, Prelacy or

Presbytery, or any such like we have been, or may be branded with, as shall after appear.

But to proceed: herein lies the difference betwixt the dispensation of the law and the gospel or new-covenant; for that of old all answers were to be received from the priests in the tabernacle. For he that appeared betwixt the cherubims there, spake forth his mind to the people; and there were also families of the prophets, to whom they resorted for the answer of the Lord (though sometimes, as a signification of the further glory that was to be revealed, it pleased God to reveal his mind to some, even to them who were neither prophets nor prophets' sons) but under the gospel, we are all to be taught of God, that is, none are excluded from this privilege by not being of the tribe of Levi, or of the children of the prophets: though this privilege is as truly exercised in some, by assenting and obeying to what God commands and reveals through others (they feeling unity with it in the life) as by such, who by the revelation and command of God's Spirit hold forth his will to his People in certain particulars, which the same Spirit leads and commands them to obey. So that we say, and that with a very good ground, that it is no way inconsistent with this sound and unerring principle to affirm, that the judgment of a certain person or persons in certain cases is infallible, or for a certain person or persons to give a positive judgment, and pronounce it as obligatory upon others, because the foundation and ground thereof is, not because they are infallible, but because in these things, and at that time they were led by the in-

fallible Spirit. And therefore it will not shelter any in this respect to pretend, I am not bound to obey the dictates of fallible man ; is not this Popery, I not being persuaded in myself? Because it is not to be disobedient to them, but to the judgment of truth through them at such a time ; and one or more their not being persuaded, may as probably proceed from their being hardened, and being out of their place, and in an incapacity to hear the requirings, as that the thing is not required of them, which none can deny ; but it may as well be supposed, as the contrary. But for the further clearing of this matter, before I conclude, I shall not doubt both to affirm and prove these following propositions.

First, That there never will, nor can be wanting, in case of controversy, the Spirit of God, to give judgment through some or other in the Church of Christ, so long as any assembly can properly, or in any tolerable supposition be so termed.

Secondly, That God hath ordinarily, in the communicating of his will under his gospel, employed such whom he had made use of in gathering of his Church, and in feeding and watching over them ; though not excluding others.

Thirdly, That their *de facto*, or effectual meeting together, and giving a positive judgment in such cases, will not import tyranny and usurpation, or an inconsistency with the universal privilege that all Christians have to be led by the Spirit ; neither will the pretences of any contradicting them, or refusing to submit upon the account they see it not, or so, excuse them from being really guilty of disobeying God.

For the first, to those that believe the scripture, there will need no other probation than that of Matt. xxviii. 20. And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. And verse 18. And the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Now if the Church of Christ were so destitute of the Spirit of God, that in case of difference there were not any found that, by the infallible Spirit, could give a certain judgment; would not then the gates of hell prevail against it? For where strife and division is, and no effectual way to put an end to it, there not only the gates, but the courts and inner chambers of darkness prevail; for where envy and strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work.

But that there may be here no ground of mistake or supposition, that we were annexing infallibility to certain persons, or limiting the church to such; I understand not by the church, every particular gathering or assembly, circumscribed to any particular country or city: for I will not refuse but divers of them, both apart and together, if not established in God's power, may err. Nor yet do I lay the absolute stress upon a general assembly of persons, as such, picked and chosen out of every one of those particular churches; as if what the generality or plurality of those conclude upon, were necessarily to be supposed to be the infallible judgment of truth: though to such an assembly of persons truly stated (as they ought) in God's power, he hath heretofore revealed his will in such cases; and yet may as the most probable way (which shall be spoken of hereafter :) yet such, as a mere assembly, is not

conclusive, nor yet do I understand by the Church, every gathering or assembly of people; who may hold sound and true principles, or have a form of truth; for some may lose the life and power of Godliness, who, notwithstanding, may retain the form or notions of things, but yet are to be turned away from, because in so far (as I observed before) as sanctification, to wit, those that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, make the Church, and give the right definition to it: where that is wholly wanting, the Church of Christ ceaseth to be; and there remains nothing but a shadow without substance. Such assemblies then are like the dead body, when the soul is departed, which is no more fit to be conversed with; because it corrupts, and proves noisome to the living. But by the Church of Christ, I understand all those that truly and really have received and hold the truth, as it is in Jesus, and are in measure sanctified, or sanctifying in and by the power and virtue thereof working in their inward parts; and this may be made up of divers distinct gatherings or churches in several countries or nations: I say, so long as these, or any of them retain that, which justly entitles them the Church or Churches of Christ (which they may be truly called) though there may fall out some differences, divisions or schisms among them; as we may see there was no small dissension in the Church of Antioch, and yet it ceased not to be a church, Acts xv. 2. and 1 Cor. i. 11.

For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, that there are contentions among you; and yet, verse 2. he entitles them the Church of

God, them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus: so long, I say, as they truly retain this title of the Church of Christ, as being really such, there will never be wanting the certain judgment of truth. For which, besides the positive promise of Christ before-mentioned (which is not without blasphemy to be called in question, or doubted of) I shall add these reasons. That seeing the Church of Christ is his body, of which he is the head, it were to make Christ negligent of his body, who styles himself the good Shepherd, and hath said, He will never leave nor forsake his own; or else (which is worse) it will infer a possibility of error, or mistake in Christ, in whom as the head, are the eyes of the body, by which it is to be ruled in all things. Next, we never find in all the scripture since the gospel, that ever this was wanting; but that God still gave infallible judgment by his Spirit in some of the respects above-mentioned. If the transactions and controversies of the after centuries be alledged, I will boldly affirm and prove, That there was never a true judgment wanting, so long as the nature and essence of the true Church was retained: if any will needs affirm otherwise, let them show me where, and I shall answer it. Though I deny not (that after the mystery of iniquity did begin to work, or had so wrought, first by intermixing, and afterwards by altogether forsaking the nature of truth, retaining only the bare name of the church) but that there might be some scattered ones, here and there one in a nation, and now and then one in an age, who by the power and virtue of the Spirit of life working in them, might be truly

sanctified; yet these were but as witnesses in sackcloth, no way sufficient to give these assemblies, in which they were engrossed, the appellation of the Church of Christ, coming no more under observation by the generality, nor having, as to them, any more influence than some little or scarcely discernible sparks of fire in many great heaps and mountains of ashes. And thus much to prove, that where there is any gathering or assembly, which truly and properly may be called the Church of Christ, the infallible judgment will never be wanting in matters of controversy.

Secondly, That ordinarily God hath, in the communicating of his will under his gospel, employed such whom he had made use of in gathering of his Church, and in feeding and watching over them, though not excluding others. For, as in a natural body (to which the Church of Christ is compared) the more substantial and powerful members do work most effectually; and their help is most necessary to supply any defect or trouble in the body: so also, if there be diversities of gifts in the Church (as is above proved) and some have a greater measure, and some a lesser; those that have the greater are more capable to do good, and to help the body in its need, than others that are weaker and less powerful. Since there are strong and weak, babes and young men, who have overcome the evil one, and in whom the word of God abideth, such are more able, when the enemy besets, to resist (having already overcome) than others who are but yet wrestling, and not conquerors. Now, every controversy and dissention in the Church comes

from the besetments of the enemy; yet if any of these strong or young men, or powerful members, go from their station, it is not denied but that they are as weak as any; and it is pre-supposing their faithfulness in their place that I thus affirm, and no otherwise. Nor yet do I limit the Lord to this method: For in him are all the treasures both of our wisdom and strength; and the weakest in his hand are as strong as the strongest, who may now, as well as heretofore, kill a Goliath by the hand of little David; yet we see the Lord doth ordinarily make use of the strong to support the weak: and indeed, when such as may be termed weak are so made use of, it alters the nature of their place, and constitutes them in a higher and more eminent degree. For though it was little David; it was also he that was to be king of Israel. Though the apostles were mean men among the Jews, yet they were such as were to be the apostles of the Lord of Glory; instruments to gather the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and to proclaim the acceptable day of the Lord. And though Paul was once accounted the least of all the saints, a child born out of due time; yet was he him who was to be the greatest apostle of the Gentiles.

Now then, let us consider whom the Lord made use of in the affairs of the primitive church, and through whom he gave forth his infallible judgment. Did he not begin first by Peter? He was the first that spake in the first meeting they had, Acts i. and who first stood up after the pouring forth of the Spirit; and who first appeared before the council of the Jews, and spake

in behalf of the gospel of Christ: though I am far from calling him (as some do) the prince of the apostles; yet I may safely say, he was one of the most ancient and eminent, and to whom Christ, in a manner somewhat more than ordinary, had recommended the feeding of his flock. We see also he was first made use of in preaching to the Gentiles, and what weight his and James's words had in the contest about circumcision towards the bringing the matter to a conclusion, Acts xv. Yet that we may see infallibility was not inseparably annexed to him, he was found blameable in a certain matter, Gal. ii. 11. notwithstanding his sentence was positively received in many particulars.

So also the apostle Paul argues from his gathering of the churches of Corinth and Galatia, that they ought to be followers of him, and positively concludes in divers things: and upon this supposition, exhorts the churches (both he and Peter) in many passages heretofore mentioned (which I will not, to avoid repetition, again rehearse) to obey the elders that watch for them; to hold such in reputation and to submit themselves to them that have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints, 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16.

Also, we see how the Lord makes use of John his beloved disciple, to inform and reprove the seven churches of Asia; and no doubt John (the rest, by the usual computation, being at that time all removed) was then the most noted and famous elder alive: and indeed I mind not where, under the gospel, Christ hath used any other method; but that he always, in revealing his will, hath

made use of such as he himself had before appointed elders and officers in his church; though it be far from us to limit the Lord, so as to exclude any from this privilege; nor yet, on the other hand, will the possibility hereof be a sufficient warrant to allow every obscure member to stand up and offer to rule, judge and condemn the whole body; nor yet is it without cause that such an one's message is jealousied and called in question, unless it have very great evidence and be bottomed upon some very weighty and solid cause and foundation. And God doth so furnish those whom he raises up, in a singular manner, of which (as I said) I mind no instance in the New Testament: and in the Old we see, though it was strange that little David should oppose himself to the great Goliath, yet he had, before that, killed both the lion and the bear, which was no less improbable; and which of all is most observable, was, before that time, by the appointment of God and the hand of the prophet, anointed king of Israel. Compare the 16th and 17th chapters of the first of Samuel.

Now as to the third, That any particular persons, de facto, or effectually giving out a positive judgment, is no encroaching nor imposing upon their brethren's conscience, is necessarily included in what is said before; upon which, for further probation, there will only need this short reflection: that for any member or members, in obedience to the Lord, to give forth a positive judgment in the Church of Christ, is their proper place and office, they being called to it; and so for them to exercise that place in the body,

which the Head moves them to, is not to usurp authority over their fellow members. As, on the other hand, to submit and obey (it being the place of some so to do) is not a renouncing a being led by the Spirit, seeing the Spirit leads them so to do: and not to obey, in case the judgment be according to truth, and the Spirit lead to it, is, no doubt, both offensive and sinful. And that all this may be supposed in a Church of Christ without absurdity, and so establish the above-mentioned propositions, will appear by a short review of the former passages.

If that Peter and James, their giving a positive judgment in the case of difference in divers particulars, did not infer them to be imposers, so neither will any so doing now, being led to it by the same authority: every one may easily make the application. And, on the contrary, if for any to have stood up and resisted their judgment, pretending an unclearness, or so, and thereby held up the difference after their sentence, breaking the peace and unity of the Church (things being concluded with an It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us) I say, if such would have given just cause of offence, and have been cut off, as despisers of dignities of old, will not the like case, now occurring, hold the same conclusion? Now, whether those propositions do not hold, upon the principles before laid down and proved, I leave to every judicious and impartial reader to judge.

Moreover, we see how positive the apostle Paul is in many particulars throughout all his epistles, insomuch as he saith, 2 Thess. ult. v.

14. If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. And in many more places, before mentioned, where he commands them both to obey him, and several others, who were appointed, (no doubt by the Spirit of God) to be rulers among them; and yet, who will say, that either the apostle did more than he ought in commanding; or they less than they were obliged to, in submitting? And yet neither were to do any thing contrary, or more than the Spirit of God in themselves led them to, or allowed them in, And if the Church of God bear any parity or proportion now in these days with what it did of old, (as I know no reason why it should not) the same things may now be supposed to take effect that did then, and also be lawfully done upon the like occasion, proceeding from the same Spirit, and established upon the same basis and foundation. And thus much, as to that part, to show in whom the power of decision is: which being seriously and impartially considered, is sufficient to clear us from the tyranny, either of popery or any other of that nature, with those that are not either wilfully blind, or very ignorant of popish principles, as the judicious reader may observe. But seeing to manifest that difference was one of those things proposed to be considered of, I shall now come to say something of it in its proper place.

SECTION VIII.

How this government altogether differeth from the oppressing and persecuting principality of the Church of Rome, and other anti-Christian assemblies.

WHATEVER way we understand the Popish principles in this matter, whether of those that are most devoted to the See of Rome, as the king of Spain's dominions and the princes of Italy; the Jesuits and generality of all those called religious orders, who hold that *Papa in cathedra non potest errare, licet absque concilio*; that is, that the pope in his chair cannot err, though without a council; or of those that are less devoted who plead this infallibility in the pope and council, lawfully convened, who yet, by the more zealous, are reckoned petty schismatics; I say, whatever way we take them, all those that do profess themselves members of the Romish church, and are so far such as to understand their own principles, do unquestionably acknowledge,

First, That no general council can be lawfully called without the bishop of Rome, as Christ's vicar and Peter's successor, call it.

Secondly, That either he himself or some for him, as his legates, must be there present and always preside.

Thirdly, That the members having vote are made up of bishops or presbyters or commissioners from the several orders, being of the clergy.

Fourthly, That what is concluded on by plurality of votes and agreed to by the pope and his

legates, must necessarily be supposed to be the judgment of the infallible Spirit.

Fifthly, That all the members of the church are bound implicitly to receive and believe it, because it proceeds from a council to be accounted lawful in the respects above mentioned, without regard to the intrinsic or real truths of the things prescribed, or bringing them in any respect to the test or examination of the Spirit of God in themselves, or the scripture's testimony, or their agreement or disagreement with truths, formerly believed and received; for so much as to prove or try them by way of doubt, they reckon a breach of the first command; as, on the other hand, a matter of merit, implicitly to receive and believe them, however inconsistent with the testimony of the Spirit in one's own heart, scripture, truth and reason.

Sixthly, That no man, as a member of the Church of Christ, in that simple capacity, unless a clergyman, or the ambassador of some king, &c. can be admitted to sit, vote, or give his judgment.

Seventhly, That it is in no respect to be supposed, that any members, especially laicks, whether in a particular city, country or nation, may meet concerning any things relating to the faith and worship of the Church, and give, by the Spirit of God any judgment; but that all such meetings are to be accounted schismatical and unlawful. And,

Lastly, That the promise of infallibility, and the gates of hell not prevailing, is necessarily annexed to the pope and council, called and authorized in the manner above expressed.

Now, if to deny every one of these propositions, wherein all understanding men know the errors and abuses of the Romish church consist, be to be popish; then indeed may we be supposed to be one with the papists in this matter, but not otherwise: so that the very mentioning of these things is sufficient to show the difference betwixt us and them. But if any will needs plead our agreement with them thus;

The papists affirm an infallibility of judgment in the Church of Christ, and so do you; therefore you are one with papists.

I answer, that proves no more our oneness, in this matter, than if it should be said, the papists plead that God ought to be worshipped, and so do you; therefore ye agree: notwithstanding of the vast differences as to that, which is not only known betwixt us and them, but betwixt them and all protestants, who agree more with them in the matter of worship than we do.

Next again, infallibility in the church (according as we hold it, and I have above defined it) no man upon our supposition, or hypothesis, can deny it. For since we first assert, as a principle, that no gathering, no church, nor assembly of people, however true their principles, or exact their form be, are to be accounted the Church of Christ, except the infallible Spirit lead and guide; what can be the hazard to say, that in such a Church there is still an infallible judgment? Indeed this is so far from popery, that it resolves in a proposition quite contradictory to them. The Romanists say, That the infallible Spirit always accompanies the outward visible

professors, and is annexed to the eternal succession of bishops and pastors, though ever so vicious as to their lives: yea, though perfect* atheists and infidels in their private judgments, yet if outwardly professing the catholic faith, and subjection to the church, they must be partakers of the infallible Spirit. We say the quite contrary: That where there is either viciousness of persons, or unsoundness of judgment in the particular members, these cannot, by virtue of any outward call or succession they have, or any profession they make, or authority they may pretend to, so much as claim an interest in any part of the Church of Christ, or the infallible Spirit.

So then, if we admit none to be members of the Church but such as are led and guided by the Spirit, it will be no popery, in the second place, to affirm, that where there is a company of people so gathered, who are not any longer to retain justly the name of the Church of Christ than they are led and guided by his Spirit, or a church so qualified and designed, there is still an infallible judgment. So that this infallibility is not annexed to the persons, to the succession, to the bare visible profession (though true, which the church of Rome is denied to be) or to any society, because of its profession; but singly, and alone to the true, real and effectual work of sanctification and regeneration, the new creature brought forth in the heart: and this is the Spiritual man, which the apostle saith, judgeth all

* For some popes have been known to deny, or at least to doubt the truth of the scriptures as to the history of Christ, and to call in question the immortality of the soul, and the resurrection.

things, 1 Cor. ii. 15. To affirm there is an infallibility here, cannot well be condemned by any; or whoso doth, must needs say, the Spirit of God is fallible: for we place the infallibility in the Spirit, and in the power, not in the persons. And so these are the degrees we ascend by: "because such and such men are led by the Spirit of God, and are obedient to the grace in their hearts, therefore are they members and officers in the Church of Christ. And because they are members of the Church of Christ in the respect before declared, therefore there is an infallible judgment among them." We do not say, Because such men profess the christian faith, and have received an outward ordination, and so are by a lawful succession formally established officers in the church, when they meet together (according to certain rules above declared) there is an infallibility annexed to their conclusions, and they cannot but decide what is right; or rather, what they decide must needs be supposed to be right. Who seeth not here a vast disproportion?

Now we differ herein fundamentally; that is, as to the very basis and foundation upon which we build; and that not only from the church of Rome, but also from the generality of protestants in this matter. All protestants do acknowledge a general council to be useful, yea necessary, in the case of division or debate; let us consider the basis upon which they proceed, and the stress they lay upon it.

First, All jointly, both the prelatical and presbyterial, will have this synod or council to con-

sist of a convocation of the clergy, chosen and sent from the particular congregations, with some few laick elders, called together by the civil magistrate, in case he be one in judgment with them.

They decide by plurality of votes. And though they assume not an absolute infallibility, in that they reckon it possible for them to err, yet do they reckon their decisions abligatory upon their supposed consonancy to the scripture; and however do affirm that the civil magistrate hath power to constrain all to submit and obey; or else to punish them either by death, banishment, imprisonment, confiscation of goods, or some other corporeal pain; even though such be persuaded, and offer to make appear, that the decisions they refuse, are contrary to the scriptures.

And lastly, (among the papists.) None, enough otherwise confessed to be a member of the church, both knowing and sober, except commisionate in some of the respects above declared, can be admitted to sit, vote, and give his judgment.

Any that will be at the pains to apply this to the foundation I before laid of the infallibility of judgment, in that we may account only to be truly called the Church of Christ, will easily see the great difference betwixt us, which I shall sum up in these particulars:

First, Do we exclude any member of the Church of Christ, that may be truly accounted so, from telling his judgment?

Secondly, Do we say a man ought to be persecuted in his outwards for his dissent in spirituals?

Thirdly, Do we plead that decision is to pass conclusive, because of the plurality of votes?

And much more, which the reader may observe from what is already mentioned; which, that it may be all more obvious at one view, will appear somewhat clearly by this following figure; which will give the reader an opportunity to recollect what lay heretofore more scattered.

I. *The Romanists say,*

1. That there is an infallibility in the Church; which infallibility is, when the pope calls a general council of bishops, &c. that whatsoever they conclude and agree upon must needs be the infallible judgment of the Spirit of God, because of the promise of Christ, That he would not suffer the gates of hell to prevail against his Church.

2. And that the pope and council, made up of certain of the clergy, having one outward succession, and being lawfully ordained, according to the canons, are that church, to which that promise is made, however wicked or depraved they be; yet this infallible judgment follows them, as being necessarily annexed to their office, in which the authority still

II. *The generality of protestants say,*

1. That though all synods and councils may err; yet such assemblies are needful for the edification of the Church. That such do consist of a convocation of the clergy, with some few laicks particularly chosen. That all others, except those so elected, have not any right to vote or give judgment.

2. That such an assembly so constitute, may ministerially determine controversies of faith, cases of conscience, matters of worship, and authoritatively determine the same. The decision is to be by plurality of votes, without any necessary respect to the inward holiness or regeneration of the persons; if so be they be outwardly called, ordained and invested in such a place

stands in its full strength and vigour.

3. So that there lies an obligation upon the whole body of the church to obey their decrees: and such as do not, are not only certainly damned for their disobedience, but that it is the duty of the civil magistrate to punish such by death, banishment or imprisonment, &c. in case they refuse.

and capacity, as gives them an authority to be members of such an assembly.

3. What they thus decide (as they judge according to the scripture) ought to be received with reverence, and submitted to: and those that do not, to be punished by the civil magistrate by death, banishment, or imprisonment, though they declare, and be ready to evidence, that it is because they are not agreeable to the scripture they refuse such decrees.

III. *The Quakers say,*

1. That whereas none truly ought, nor can be accounted the Church of Christ, but such as are in a measure sanctified, or sanctifying, by the Grace of God, and led by his Spirit; nor yet any made officers in the Church but by the Grace of God, and inward revelation of his Spirit (not by outward ordination or succession) from which none is to be excluded, if so called, whether married or a tradesman, or a servant.

2. If so be in such a Church there should arise any difference, there will be an infallible judgment from the Spirit of God, which may be in a general assembly; yet not limited to it, as excluding others: and may prove the judgment of the plurality, yet not to be decided thereby, as if the infallibility were placed there, excluding

the fewer. In which meeting or assembly upon such an account, there is no limitation to be of persons particularly chosen; but that all that in a true sense may be reckoned of the Church, as being sober and weighty, may be present, and give their judgment.

3. And that the infallible judgment of truth, (which cannot be wanting in such a church) whether it be given through one or more, ought to be submitted to, not because such persons give it, but because the Spirit leads so to do; which every one coming to in themselves, will willingly and naturally assent to. And if any, through disobedience or unclearness, do not all that the Church ought to do, she is to deny them her spiritual fellowship, in case the nature of their disobedience be of that consequence as may deserve such a censure; but by no means, for matter of conscience, to molest, trouble, or persecute any in their outwards.

Who will be at the pains to compare these three seriously together, I am hopeful will need no further argument to prove the difference. But if any will further object, what if it fall out, *de facto*, that the teachers, elders, or plurality, do decide (and from thence will say) this is like the Church of Rome, and other false Churches? It will be hard to prove that to be an infallible mark of a wrong judgment, as we have not said it is of a right. And indeed to conclude it were so, would necessarily condemn the Church in the apostles days, where we see the teachers and elders, and so far as we can observe, the greater number did agree to the decision, Acts i. 15.

For if the thing be right, and according to truth, it is so much the better that the elders and greater number do agree to it; and if wrong, their affirming it will not make it right: and truly a gathering, where the elders and greater number are always, or most frequently wrong, and the younger and lesser number right, is such, as we cannot suppose the true Church of Christ to be. And if any will plead, that there is now no infallible judgment to be expected from the Spirit of God in the Church, it, no doubt, will leave the dissenters as much in the mist, and at as great a loss, as those they dissent from; both being no better than blind men, hitting at random, which will turn Christianity into scepticism. And though we may acknowledge, that this uncertainty prevails in the generality of those called Churches; yet we do firmly believe (for the reasons above declared, and many more that might be given) that the true Church of Christ has a more solid, stable foundation; and being never separated from Christ, her head, walks in a more certain, steady, and unerring path.

THE CONCLUSION.

THE substance then of what is asserted and proved in this treatise, resolves in these following particulars.

First, That in the Church of Christ, when it consists of a visible people (for I speak not here of the Church in the dark night of apostacy, that consisted not of any society visibly united) gathered into the belief of certain principles, and united in the joint performance of the worship of God, as meeting together, praying, preaching, &c. there is, and still must be, a certain order and government.

Secondly, That this government, as to the outward form of it, consists of certain meetings appointed principally for that end; yet not so as to exclude acts of worship, if the Spirit move thereunto.

Thirdly, The object of this government is two-fold, outwards and inwards. The outwards relate mainly to the care of the poor, of widows and fatherless; where may be also included marriages, and the removing of all scandals in things undeniably wrong. The inwards respect an apostacy, either in principles or practices that have a pretence of conscience, and that either denying some truths already received and believed, or asserting new doctrines that ought not to be received. Which again (to sub-divide) may either be in things fundamental, and of great moment; or in things of less weight in themselves, yet proceeding from a wrong spirit, and

which in the natural and certain consequence of them, tend to make schisms, divisions, animosities, and in sum, to break that bond of love and unity that is so needful to be upheld and established in the Church of Christ. And here come also under this consideration all emulations, strifes, backbitings, and evil surmisings.

Fourthly, That in the true Church of Christ, (according to the definition above given of it) there will, in such cases of differences and controversies, still be an infallible judgment from the Spirit of God, either in one or other, few or more.

Fifthly, That this infallible judgment is only, and unalterably, annexed and seated in the Spirit and power of God; not to any particular person or persons, meeting or assembly, by virtue of any settled ordination, office, place or station, that such may have, or have had in the Church; no man, men, nor meeting standing, or being invested in any authority in the Church of Christ, upon other terms than so long as he or they abide in the living sense and unity of the life in their own particulars; which whosoever, one or more, inwardly departs from *ipso facto*, loses all authority, office, or certain discerning, he or they formerly have had, though retaining the true principles and sound form, and (may be) not fallen into any gross practices, as may declare them generally to be thus withered and decayed.

Sixthly, That Jesus Christ, under the gospel, hath ordinarily revealed his will in such cases through the elders and ministers of the Church, or a general meeting; whose testimony is neither

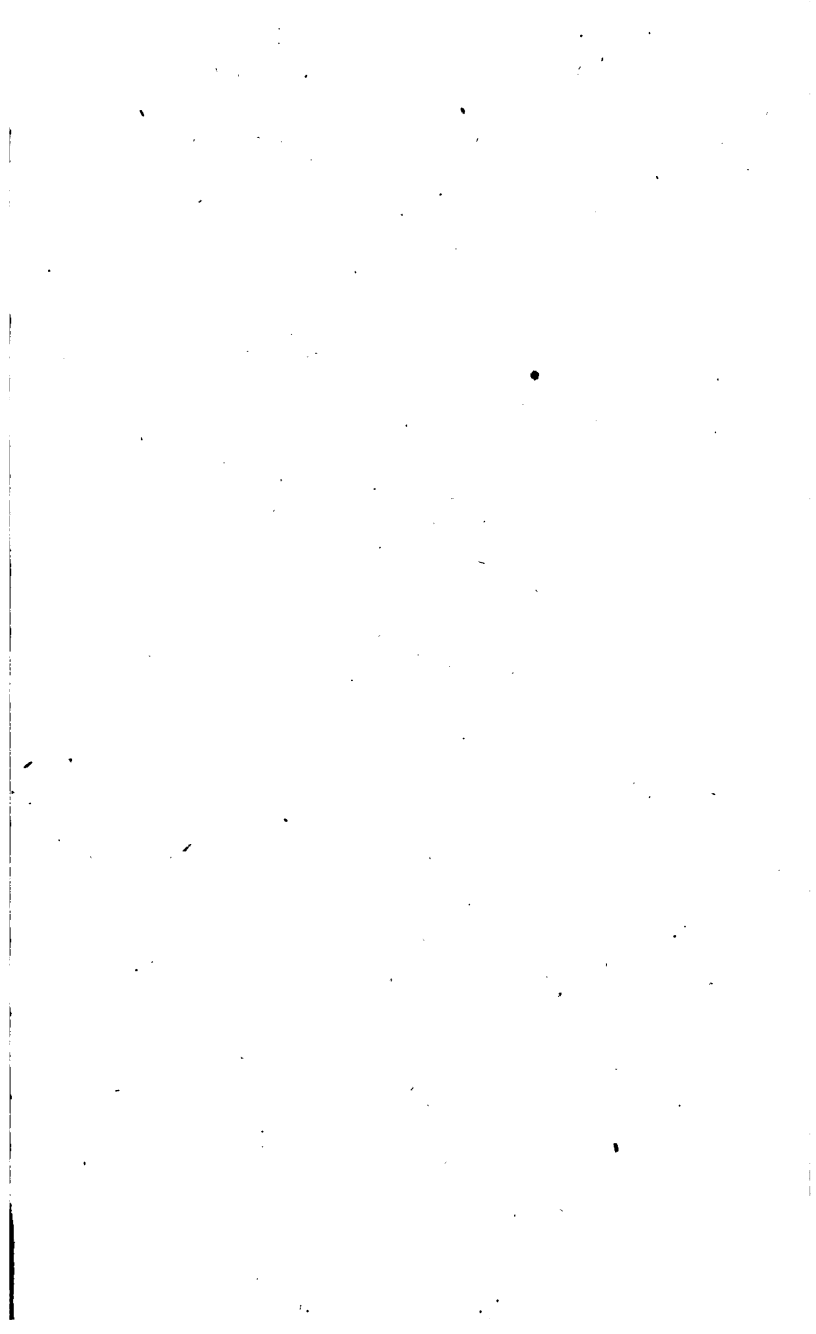
to be despised or rejected, without good cause. Neither is their taking upon them really to decide, any just ground to charge them with imposition, or to quarrel with their judgment; unless it can be proved, that they are decayed, and have lost their discerning, as above.

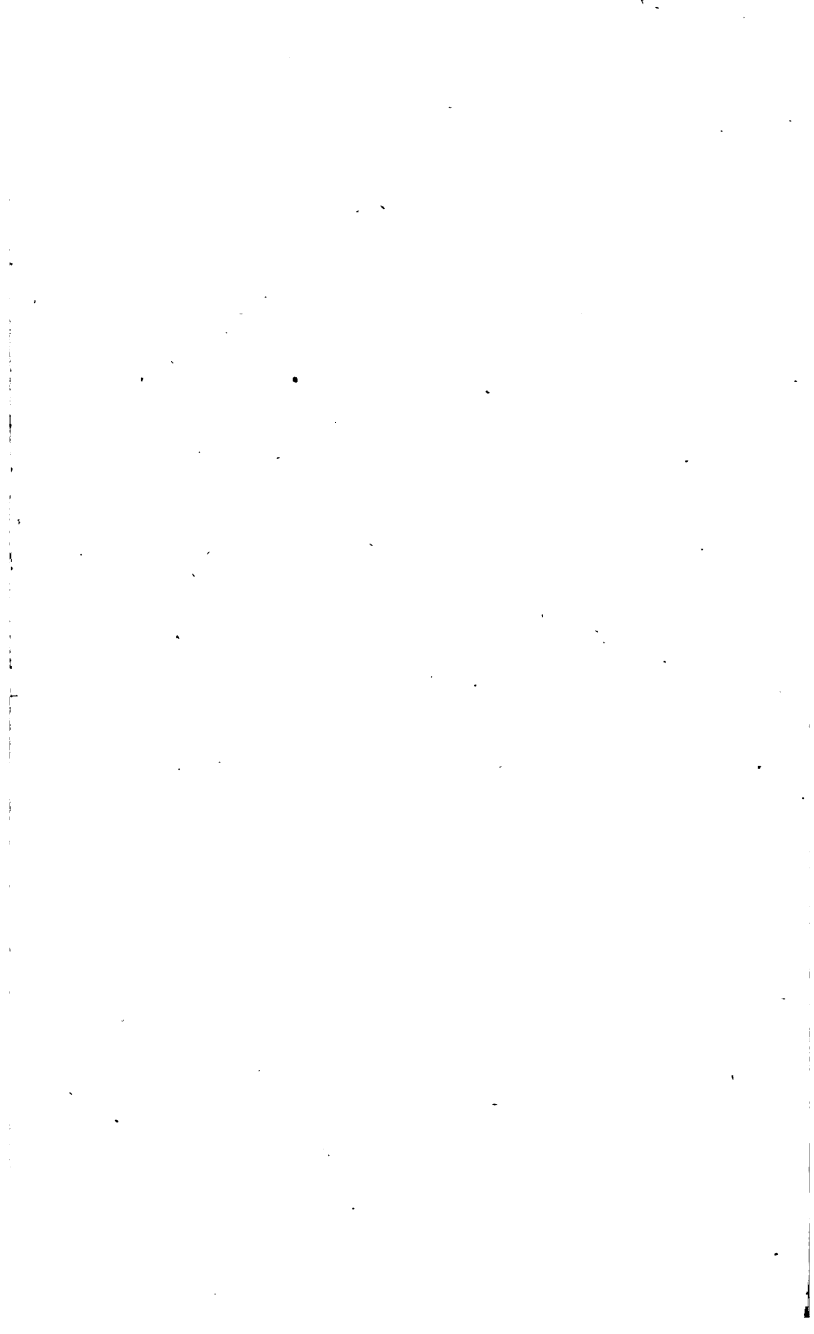
Seventhly, That to submit and obey in such cases, is no detracting from the common privilege of Christians, to be inwardly led by the Spirit, seeing the Spirit has led some heretofore so to do, and yet may. And that every pretence of unclearness is not a sufficient excuse for disobedience, seeing that may proceed from obstinacy, or a mind prepossessed with prejudice: Yet say I not any ought to do it before they be clear; and who are every way right, will not want clearness in what they ought to do.

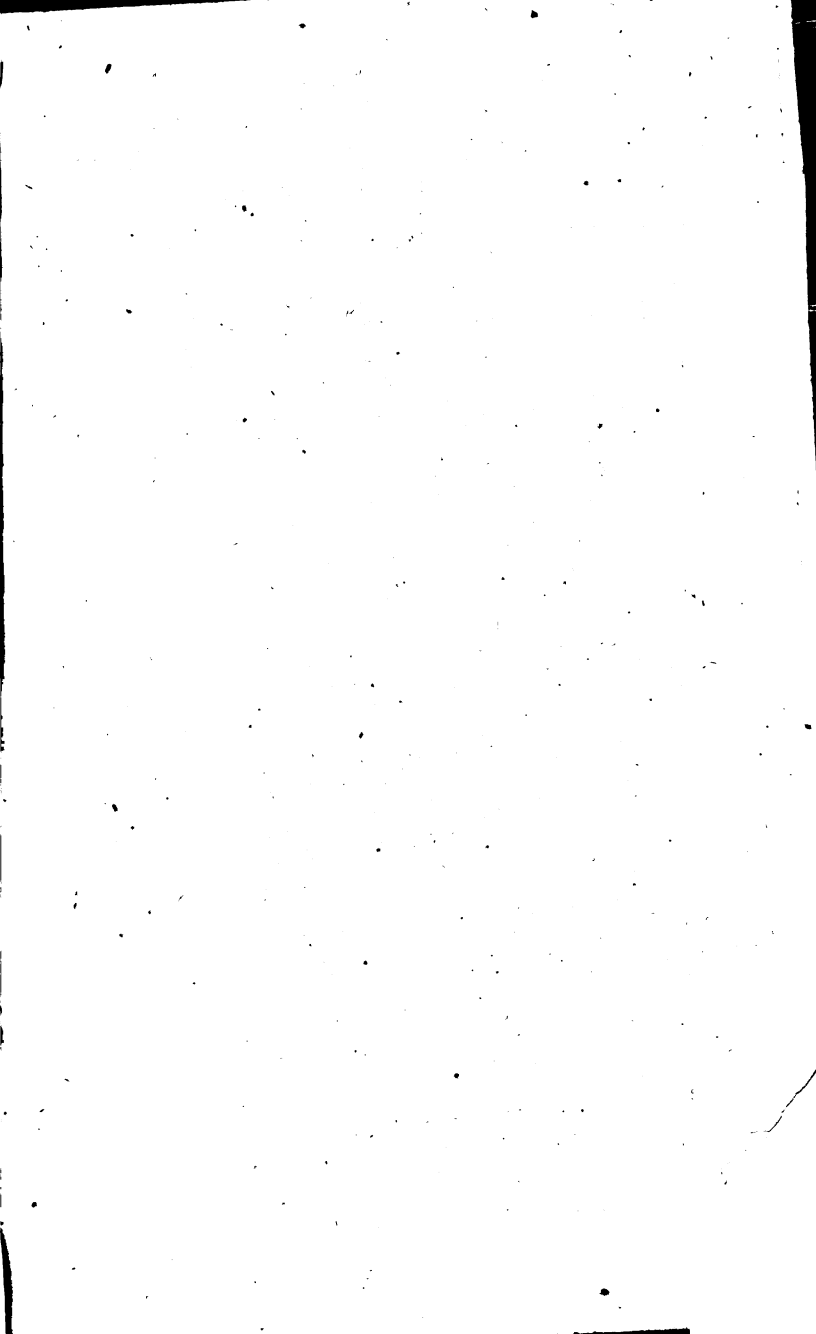
And, lastly, That these principles are no ways tainted with imposition or contrary to true liberty of conscience: and that they fundamentally differ from the usurpation both of popery, prelacy, and presbytery, or any other of that nature.

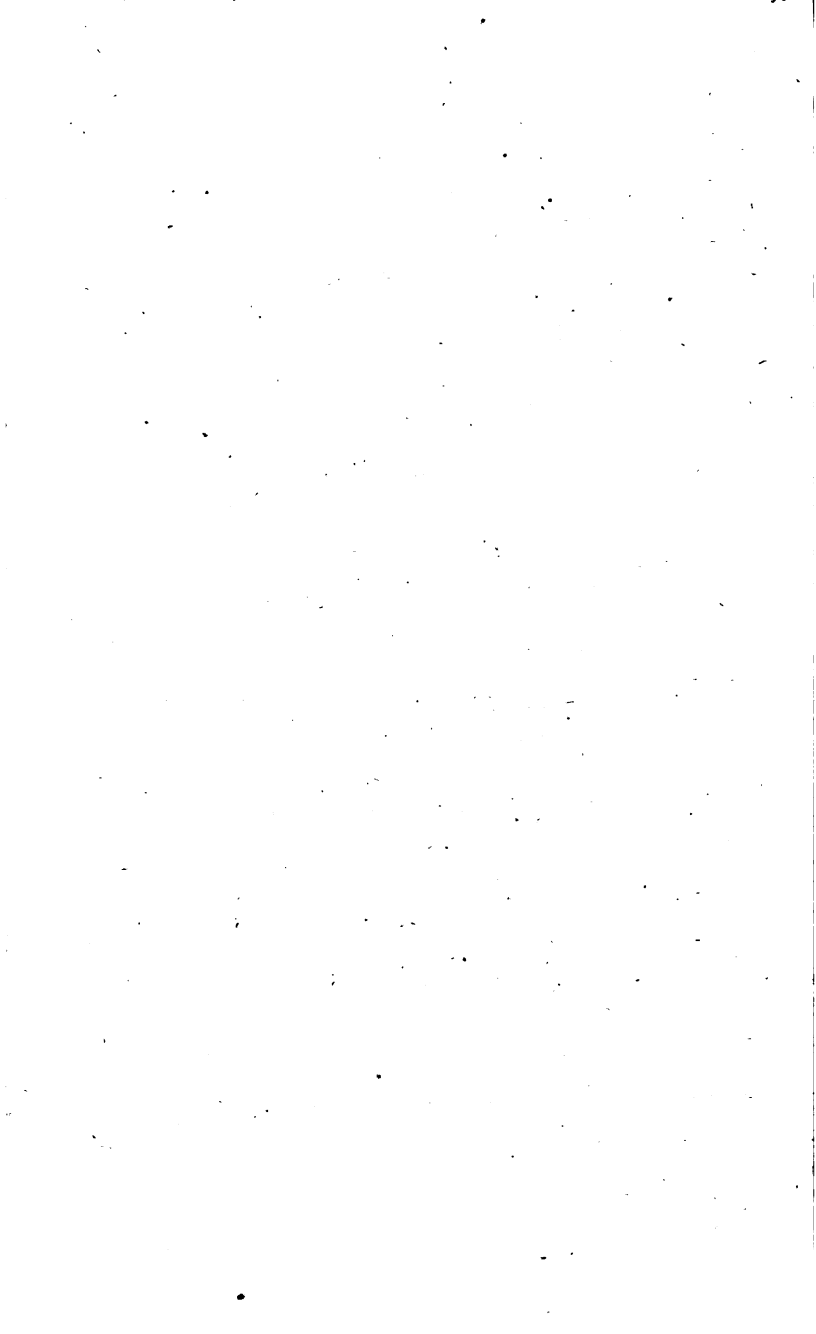
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FINIS.













Jan. 11, 1908

